

PORTRAITS IN MOONLIGHT



CARL JACOBI

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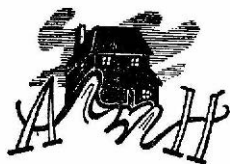
PORTRAITS IN MOONLIGHT

Books by Carl Jacobi

REVELATIONS IN BLACK
EAST OF SAMARINDA
THE JADE SCARLOTTI

CARL JACOBI

*Portraits
in
Moonlight*



ARKHAM HOUSE

Sauk City, Wisconsin

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—to the memory

● of my father . . .

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PORTRAITS IN MOONLIGHT

Portrait in Moonlight

The Trinidad offices of Holworth and Company, Importers and Exporters, in Weightson Road near the Port-of-Spain waterfront, were under the capable, if unprogressive, managership of Rupert Clarkson. Clarkson, in his forty-sixth year, was a widower and a rather moody individual, with a tall, loose-jointed frame, narrow shoulders, and lonely eyes. He lived in Queen's Park West, quite a distance from the Holworth offices, but he always chose to walk, claiming that he needed the exercise.

As a matter of fact, there were a number of things Clarkson felt he needed. He was in a word growing old, and none realized it more than he. There were lines and crow's feet about his eyes. He had developed a slight stoop, probably from bending for long hours over a desk, and his hair was graying rapidly.

Psychologically, Clarkson knew that he should accept these changes as a matter of course, but somehow he couldn't do that. He was still young in spirit, and the knowledge that his material body was showing some signs of wear, however slight, greatly concerned him. The bureau in his bedroom was littered with bottles of restorers, dyes, and other masculine cosmetics, all of which he had given a trial and then discarded as either worthless or too obvious in their effect.

"It's this infernal sticky heat," he said on more than one occasion. "It ages one. Trinidad is no place for a man of my sort."

Fearful of getting into a rut, Clarkson varied the course of his walk to work each day. But he always stopped at the corner of Dundonald Street and Tragarete Road to watch an aged Negro man stand before an improvised easel on the sidewalk and paint pictures of local scenes.

The old fellow was quite good Clarkson thought. He used a dried palm leaf for a palette, and his colors apparently were made from crushed berries and roots which only a West Indian would know where to obtain. One time he painted *The Three Sisters*, the trio of mountain peaks for which Trinidad was famous. Again it was a scene of the harbor with the many vessels at anchor there.

While interested, Clarkson had never been tempted to buy one of these paintings until one blazing afternoon in January. Then he watched the Negro add the finishing touches to a picture smaller in size than usual. In rudely lettered Spanish, it bore the title *Youth*. Curiously, it presented the likeness of a middle-aged man with a gaunt, lined face, thin lips, and eyes set wide apart. But the moment Clarkson gazed upon that face, a responsive chord was touched in his brain. The picture cost him six and threepence.

Later in his room he debated with himself as to where he should hang the painting, if indeed he should hang it at all. It was then that he noticed the five words printed in pencil on the back of the canvas. The words read:

Put me in the moonlight.

Clarkson frowned. Picture in the moonlight. It didn't make sense. But then so many things didn't make sense here in the islands. In the end he hung the picture high upon the east wall, opposite the two French windows, and forgot about it.

For a week thereafter Clarkson was forced to forego his daily

walks because of inclement weather. The rain came down in torrents, and the offices of Holworth and Company were damp and gloomy. The gloominess made him irritable, and when he was told that Stephen Tarpan requested an interview, Clarkson lost his temper. Stephen was the Negro who formerly had been in the employ of the company as a messenger. His duties had included delivering last-minute notes to ship captains, the customs office, and other simple missions. In his spare time he had done a little dusting and cleaning.

"So you're here again," Clarkson said as the Negro shuffled into the office. "How many times do I have to tell you your services are no longer needed."

Stephen rolled a faded cap back and forth in his hands nervously.

"Please, sar," he said, "give Stephen 'nother chance. I work ver hard, sar. I tek care of letters and t'ings very rapidly."

"No." Clarkson shook his head in quiet decision. "That's just your trouble. That's why I had to let you go. You loiter, Stephen." Then he added brutally, "You might as well realize it, you're getting old, and this company is no home for the aged."

Clarkson went home that night in worse spirits than usual. Port-of-Spain was getting to be a hopelessly dull place. It seemed that all the unattached women in his club circles were either too old or too young. People never had any good times any more. He wondered what had become of that lovely Baret girl with whom he had had such wonderful times the summer of . . . Good Lord, that had been the summer of '46, eighteen years ago. It seemed incredible.

He reached his home at length, a modest "villa" set well back from the street in a grove of palmistes, and went directly to his bedroom, intending to lie down for a while before dinner. But the first thing that caught his eye as he crossed the threshold was

the picture he had bought from the Negro street artist. It was a picture no longer, merely a blurred mass of run-together colors.

Clarkson went up to it and studied it for some moments. Vaguely, he could discern the outlines of the former painting: the eyes, the lips, the jaw, but that was all. He swore softly. That's what came from patronizing these peddlers. They were a worthless lot, all of them.

Nevertheless, Clarkson made it a point to stop the next morning at the intersection of Dundonald Street and Tragarete Road. The Negro artist was there, his easel propped up on a shady spot of sidewalk. Without wasting words, Clarkson explained what had happened.

The Negro smiled. "You hang him in de sunlight," he said. "Thas de trouble. You must hang him in de moonlight."

"But that doesn't do me any good now," Clarkson said. "The picture's ruined."

Again the Negro smiled. He opened a little tin box from among his assortment of brushes, rolled canvases and paints and drew forth a long slender stick of bamboo. In the end of it was fitted a small cap of yellowish transparent material that looked not unlike amber.

"Tek this stick, sar. Rub him all over de picture. Then he will come back."

Clarkson accepted the bamboo doubtfully. It occurred to him as he lingered there that there was something strangely familiar about the Negro's face. Then he remembered Stephen Tarpan; of course, the artist and his former messenger must be related. He was about to ask if this were true, but for some reason his query died unspoken.

The weather turned clear that day, and early in the evening

a full moon came up. Clarkson carefully massaged his face with a new kind of cleansing clay he had sent for from the States and retired early. He awoke in the middle of the night with the moon shining through his open window. It was also shining on the faded painting on the wall, and he remembered suddenly the artist's instructions as to how to restore it. He got out of bed, took up the bamboo stick from the bureau and began to run the capped end slowly back and forth over the blurred canvas. For a moment he was conscious of an electric thrill, like a faint vibration, passing from the bamboo stick up his wrist into his arm. Then the sensation passed, only to be followed by a vague impression that the faded lips in the painting had curved upward and were smiling at him. Clarkson rubbed his eyes sleepily and went back to bed.

He did not sleep well the rest of the night. The skin about his cheeks and lower jaw and across his abdomen seemed to have become tight and drawn. He was conscious, too, of his heart beating more rapidly than usual. Shortly before dawn he fell into a gloomy unpleasant dream that he was a boy again but that all his friends were old men and old women.

When he awoke, the first thing that focused into his eyes was the picture. He sat bolt upright, staring. The painting was completely restored! Gazing back at him from the depths of brilliant pigment was the face of the middle-aged man with the wide-apart eyes. But the face could hardly be called middle-aged now. There was an indefinable freshness to it that changed its appearance entirely. It was as if ten years of time had been removed from it.

Clarkson got his second start when he went into the bathroom to shave. The reflection that looked back at him from the mirror was different from yesterday morning or even a morning a year ago. The crow's feet above his eyes were still there, but they

had thinned perceptibly. The bald spot over the left temple was covered with a nice growth of hair. And his hair! It was a rich, shiny black with only the faintest trace of gray.

It couldn't be that cleansing clay, Clarkson told himself; but what then was responsible for the change? After a moment it came to him that perhaps the signs of age he thought he had detected before had existed only in his imagination. He broke out into a cheery whistle as he pursued this line of reasoning, took particular pains with his dress that morning and headed for work in a fine fettle.

That day was a memorable one in Clarkson's life. From the moment he first entered the Holworth offices and was greeted by his stenographer to the time he met Inspector Bainley of the Trinidad Constabulary on his way home, the hours presented one steady round of complimentary remarks about his youthful appearance. Bainley was even more enthusiastic than the others.

"What the devil have you done, Clarkson," the inspector said, "found your own private fountain of youth? You look positively juvenile today."

Only one circumstance in fact marred the day's routine. Late in the afternoon Stephen Tarpan approached Clarkson again, asking for a return to his job. The whining insistence of the Negro broke the manager's patience. He marched Stephen to the door, and then when the Negro still hesitated, he gave him a forceful push down the stairs. Stephen pitched headlong, rolling over and over to the bottom. He lay there motionless a long time while Clarkson suffered a pang of dismay. Then with a low moan he got painfully to his feet and hobbled off.

That night was almost a repetition of the night before. Some time in the small hours Clarkson awoke to find a shaft of brilliant moonlight shining into the room and illuminating the por-

trait on the wall. The face in the painting seemed to be smiling even more broadly now. Yet Clarkson got the impression that there was no mirth in the smile, but rather that the lips were parted in a kind of hideous mockery. Again he slept badly during the remaining hours, and again he felt that same drawing sensation in the skin of his face, abdomen, and to a lesser extent, his legs. When he began to dream, it was a wild fantastic dream, without sense or meaning.

He was walking along a broad highway that ran straight as a crayon line to the horizon. Flanking the highway on either side were the brown stumps of chopped-down trees, and upon each stump stood the black-garbed figure of a very old man, leaning on a long cane. As Clarkson strode past these figures, he looked at their faces, and he saw that each was the face of some acquaintance he had known or met in the past. And with each step he took he felt the years sloughing off him, felt himself growing incredibly younger.

The next morning Clarkson was amazed at what he saw in the glass. He beheld a man of scarcely thirty. The crow's feet had entirely disappeared. There was not a thread of gray in his hair, and his complexion was clear and alive with the freshness of youth.

So great was the change that he had some misgivings about what his fellow workers at the office would say. Accordingly, with a little smile of satisfaction, he dusted a little talcum over his temples. Whatever miracle he had stumbled upon—and it must be a miracle—it would not do to let his friends become curious all at once.

No easel or Negro artist met his gaze at the street corner that morning. Mildly curious, Clarkson was prompted to enter the tobacconist's shop in front of which the man had always done his painting and inquire as to his whereabouts.

"I don't know where he is," the tobacconist said. "He left here in a hurry yesterday, saying that his brother had been injured in a fall down a flight of stairs."

Arriving at the Holworth and Company offices, Clarkson found an important letter waiting for him. The letter required his presence at Fort-de-France, Martinique, immediately. The *Compagnie de Français*, an import concern with which the Holworth branch had had dealings, was aroused over what it claimed to be false representation of merchandise. Clarkson might have entrusted his reply to the post or the wireless, but the *Compagnie de Français* was a big account, and he preferred to arrange matters in person.

There was just time to catch the *Island Queen*. He left word that he would be gone for a week and hurried home to pack a few necessities.

The instant he entered his room he was aware that a prowler had been there. One of his bureau drawers was partially open, and the bamboo stick given him by the Negro artist lay on the floor, not on the table where he had left it. A faint spicy odor lingered in the air. A quick search, however, failed to reveal any stolen valuables. Clarkson made sure his door was locked before he left.

Two days later he walked down the gangplank of the *Island Queen* and entered Fort-de-France. It was ten years since he had been in Martinique, and the island seemed strange to him. Historic Fort Lewis with its massive walls and battlements brooded over the harbor, and in the background Mont Pele towered, quiet now since its earth-shattering eruption of 1902. Only the *Savane*, the open park in the center of the town, studded with royal palms, looked cool and inviting under the tropical sun.

He took a room at the Hotel de la Paix, drank an aperitif, and ate his luncheon. It was while he sat enjoying a cigar in the

hotel dining room that he suddenly became aware of the young woman at a table some distance away. He was on his feet in a moment, striding across to her.

"Mona Albrey," he greeted. "How are you? What on earth are you doing here?"

The woman's face broke into a smile of surprise and recognition as she looked up. "Why, hello, Rupert," she said. "Don't tell me you've exchanged Trinidad for Martinique in your old age?"

"No, I'm still living in Port-of-Spain," Clarkson replied. "I'm here on business." And added, "Do I look older?"

She was a handsome brunette in her early forties, dressed in a cool linen suit, with a pert green hat to match her jade earrings. She gazed across the table with eyes filled with admiration.

"Not a bit of it," she said. "In fact, you look so boyish I hardly would have recognized you."

They sat there, chatting of old times and idle gossip. At length Mona Albrey reached for her purse. She was doing an article for an American magazine on native costumes, she explained. She had all her material, but as a final wind-up she wanted to take in a Martinican festival scheduled for that afternoon in a village near St. Pierre.

"Want to come along?" she asked. "It's only about forty kilometers, and I have a rented car outside."

Clarkson replied that nothing would please him more. They drove north out of Fort-de-France, crossed the fashionable residential Plateau Didier, and then followed the highway through the villages of Balsa and Absalon. Here Mona Albrey turned off into a wretched side road that climbed steadily into the highlands. As he sat beside her, Clarkson began to experience a feeling of unease. The drawing and tightening sensation about his

skin was there again, though latent, and he knew that that feeling presaged a change again in his appearance. How long, he wondered, would this retrogressive action on the part of his age continue. It seemed he could feel a fresh vitality rippling through his body with each passing hour. Right now, in fact, he felt like leaping from the car and racing it on foot up the hill.

Mona Albrey shifted her hands on the wheel.

"You know, Rupert, the air in these latitudes must agree with you. I declare, you positively look as if you were still in your twenties."

Clarkson thought of the portrait back in his room in Port-of-Spain and the strange series of events that had so changed his life since he had obtained it. Did that painting exert a power upon him? Was it his imagination or was he growing younger even as the man in the portrait grew younger?

Then all at once he had other things to occupy his mind.

The car missed firing, slowed, and stopped. Mona jiggled the controls on the dashboard, pressed the starter repeatedly without results. She turned helplessly.

"I'll fix it," Clarkson said. "I'm rather good at this sort of thing."

But the hours dragged past, and still he labored with greasy hands under the car's bonnet. When at length he stepped back with a sigh, and the motor roared into life once more, shadows had begun to lengthen across the road and a golden moon was rising above the tree-tops.

And simultaneously with the appearance of that moon, Clarkson felt the drawing and tightening increase about his body a hundred fold. His complacent satisfaction was gone now. In its place a dull horror began to creep upon him. For he realized that with each passing minute he was slowly but irresistibly growing younger.

It was now, of course, too late to attend the festival. Mona drove rapidly back toward town, her hands playing nervously with the wheel. From time to time she cast an uneasy glance at the man beside her. Yet as the miles passed, they saw no sign of the highway.

"I'm certain we should have turned left at that last fork," Clarkson said. "This stretch of road doesn't seem familiar at all."

The countryside appeared to be growing wilder and more rugged. They crossed deep valleys over narrow ramshackle bridges that threatened to plunge them into the roaring streams below. Jungle took the place of open savannah. Tall bearded cabbage palms towered up into a blue-black sky, and in the moonlight massive ferns loomed like so many phantoms crouching on either side of the road.

They were crossing a narrow plateau when abruptly a low sound reached their ears over the hum of the car's motor. It was the sound of drums, and it grew steadily louder as they advanced. The road made a sudden turn. Before them a small glade was revealed in the flanking wall of trees, and in the center a large fire blazed luridly. Around that fire a group of shadowy figures paced slowly to the tempo of muted tom-toms.

Mona stopped the car and watched them for some minutes in silence.

"A voodoo dance," she said at length. "Come on. I want to see this."

With misgivings, Clarkson followed her out of the car. Keeping carefully in the shadows, they entered the rank undergrowth and made their way forward until they reached a point twenty yards from the fire.

Clarkson saw then that there were about twenty Negroes in the group. All were in poor nondescript costume save a very old

black woman who wore a full skirt of flowered silk with a gaudy fichu about her throat and a flaming red *madras* over her head. Heavy gold earrings glittered in the firelight.

Other details came into focus then as the Trinidad manager's eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom. Tied to a stake at the far side of the glade and bleating tremulously was a young goat. Beside the fire stood an upturned tree stump like a rude altar, on the top of which rested an earthen cup and a brass crucifix. And suspended from vine lashings above hung the squirming and twisting body of a captive *fer-de-lance*.

These were the physical details. But as Clarkson looked into the faces of the natives, as he saw the unbridled fanaticism in their eyes, a wave of loathing swept through him.

The ceremony began with a multiple-voiced shout. The *mamaloï* in the crimson turban seized a long hooked knife and plunged it into the throat of the goat. An instant later the earthen cup was filled with the spurting blood from the dying animal. The frenzied natives dipped hands into the crimson cup and leaped and danced to the wild rhythm of the tom-toms. Then suddenly the drums fell silent, and an ancient black man hobbled into the light of the fire.

The *mamaloï* approached him, carrying a long narrow wooden box. She opened its cover and drew out a length of bamboo, capped at one end with an amber-like substance. She dipped the capped end into the blood cup and began to rub it over the body of the aged black. Horror blanketed Clarkson. The stick was the same kind given him by the Negro street artist in Port-of-Spain.

And then as he watched he saw the old man before him rapidly change in physical appearance. The flesh on his wrinkled face sloughed away; his body became erect, thinner and smaller.

But Clarkson had seen enough. He seized Mona's arm and led her stumbling back to the car.

They spoke no words during the remainder of the drive. Miraculously, a few miles beyond the road branched into the main highway, and presently they were back in Fort-de-France. Clarkson said goodnight and goodbye to Mona Abrey and climbed the stairs to his room. There he threw himself on the bed, covered his eyes and moaned aloud.

Only one fact was clear to him. In some incredible way his life was tied up with that portrait on the wall in his room in Port-of-Spain. When the moonlight shone upon it, he grew steadily younger. When the moonlight passed, time for him moved on again.

He must get back to Trinidad and tear that painting from the wall!

But there was still another day and night to be spent in Fort-de-France before the boat would leave. Morning, and Clarkson deliberately avoided looking in the mirror. He ate his breakfast, went out on the street and began to walk in long brisk strides, heading toward the *Savane*. Beside the statue of Empress Josephine he paused a moment. A youth scarcely out of his teens approached.

"Pardon, M'sieu, am I early or have the others gone already?"

Clarkson regarded him curiously. "There must be some mistake," he said.

"Of course," said the other, "it was stupid of me. But I was told all the young people who were going to Mademoiselle Chauson's country drive would meet here, and when I saw you, I thought that . . . Ah, here they are now."

A group of rollicking young people approached down the

street, followed by three old-fashioned horse-drawn phaetons. Quickly the youth joined them, and the procession moved to the far side of the square. Clarkson ran a hand slowly over his beardless jaw. *None of the group was more than nineteen or twenty years old!*

He was on the ship at last! The door to his cabin was closed and locked. The two ports were shut tight, and the electric lights were turned out. In utter darkness Clarkson lay on the bed, body bathed in cold perspiration.

It was midnight, and up on deck the ship was swathed in moonlight. Moonlight, too, was shining over Port-of-Spain, shining through the windows into his room upon the portrait on the wall. He could sense it, could feel it with every fiber of his body. As if he were encased in a steel net, the skin about his chest, his abdomen, his legs, arms, and face grew steadily tighter.

Clarkson knew that he had shrunk in stature by more than half. His body was now that of a small boy. And as he lay there and time flowed backward, he looked through the darkness at the far wall.

... he was flying his kite on the high knoll back on his Connecticut farm home. The wind was cool on his face, and he could hear his mother calling him. He turned and began to run toward the house, but halfway his little legs fell as he tried to climb the steps. . . . His mother gathered him in her arms and placed him in his crib, crooning to him softly. . . . The milk felt warm and good in his throat . . . and he closed his eyes as the blackness slowly gathered about him. . . .

Inspector Bainley of the Trinidad Constabulary had given the room a thorough search.

"It looks like a closed case as far as our end is concerned," he told the Warrant Officer. "This chap, Clarkson, left for Martinique on Tuesday noon. He was due back here the following

Satur day at the latest. We know that he embarked for the return trip to Trinidad."

"He seems to have left nothing behind," the Warrant Officer said, "nothing that would show he was despondent or feared foul play."

Bainley nodded, frowning. "Clarkson complained of feeling ill, declared that he would stay in his cabin and requested that he not be disturbed. No one saw him after he boarded at Fort-de-France. Yet when the boat docked at Port-of-Spain, he had disappeared. . . . What the devil are you staring at?"

The Warrant Officer's eyes were wide.

"This picture on the wall, sir," he said. "I could have sworn that it was the portrait of a baby when I first entered the room. Now, it's a blank canvas."

Witches in the Cornfield

Both Mr. Maudsley and Mr. Trask were resplendent that October evening. Mr. Maudsley stood deep in the cornfield, overall trousers ballooning in the wind, one hand nailed to a pie-tin that caught the moonlight and reflected it like a mirror. While across the road the hat of Mr. Trask was bright with the strip of foil Jimmy had fastened to it that morning.

From the rear seat of the car Jimmy looked down upon the two figures as the road wound between the shocked fields.

Next to him his sister, Stella, said, "Mr. Trask looks fine to-night. I think he likes the silver ribbon you gave him."

Jimmy nodded. "Mr. Maudsley looks good too. See the way his hand shines?"

In the driver's seat as he twisted the wheel to avoid a rut in the road, grey-haired Mr. Tapping coughed and glanced at his wife.

"What are those kids whispering about?"

The whispers died abruptly, and the car rattled over Goose Creek bridge and began the long climb to the Tapping farm.

They stopped at the roadside mailbox, but there was no mail; then they were rolling up the cedar-lined lane, past the silo, past the barn, into the farmyard.

Stella went into the house with her mother, but Jimmy re-

mained with his father to open the garage doors. He snapped the big padlock shut after the car was put away, made a vain attempt to catch Higgins, the cat, and followed Mr. Tapping up the porch steps into the house. Upstairs in his room half an hour later, he undressed reluctantly and climbed into bed, wide awake. He lay there listening to the old house creak and groan in the night wind.

From the distance came the mournful wail of a train whistle.

Presently Jimmy got out of bed, crossed to the window and stood looking out into the moon light. Below him he could see his ball bat leaning against the shadows. Beyond was the outline of a mounted horseman, the pump, and beyond that the grey circular walls of the silo pointed upward like a castle tower. Something caught Jimmy's eye, made him look to the east. He looked again, then moved to the table and rummaged through the drawer until he found the silver spyglass his father had given him last Christmas. He carried the glass back to the window, pushed the window open and peered out.

In the bright moonlight he could see Mr. Maudsley clearly. And a little farther on he could see Mr. Trask. Two silent figures alone in the cornfields.

The boy lowered the glass, wiped the lens on his sleeve, and carefully focused again. A puzzled frown furrowed his face. Save for the flapping of his trousers in the wind, Mr. Maudsley stood motionless, as of course he should. But, Mr. Trask. . . . A passing cloud slid over the moon, darkening the landscape. In the few seconds before it brought complete blackness Jimmy thought he saw Mr. Trask kick up his heels, leap high in the air and begin to dance a rigadon over the shocked corn.

At breakfast next morning Jimmy waited impatiently for his sister to come downstairs. He hoped she would get to the table before his father because with Papa present he couldn't talk, and

he wanted to talk. When at last Stella took her chair, he stretched his foot under the table and kicked her slightly.

"I've got a secret," he whispered.

"Tell it to me," said Stella.

"It's a big secret."

"If you won't tell, I won't give you any of my Flinch candy."

"Jimmy was silent a moment as he gave this thought. Then he leaned forward and whispered.

"Mr. Trask moved last night."

"He always moves," replied Stella, unimpressed.

"I mean really moved. Toward Mr. Maudsley."

Stella choked on her porridge and the spoon all but slipped from her hand. She stared with wide open eyes. "He didn't."

Their whispers broke off as Mr. Tapping strode across the kitchen and took his place at the head of the table. A heavy-set unimaginative man who seldom entered into conversation with the children, he eyed them speculatively. But he said nothing and began to eat his eggs and thick strips of bacon. He ate slowly and methodically, keeping his eyes to the table. When he had finished his coffee, he settled back to light his pipe. He passed the match back and forth across the bowl with quiet deliberation.

"Who's Mr. Maudsley and who's Mr. Trask?"

His wife smiled. "Those are just the names the children have given the scarecrows."

"What scarecrows?"

"The one in our field and the one on Edmund's land."

Mr. Tapping considered this while strong curls of strong tobacco smoke rose about him.

"Why those names? Why not Brown and Smith?"

"Because those are their names," explained Stella patiently.

Mr. Tapping cogitated on the mysteries of the juvenile mind.

Abruptly he remembered the section of pasture fence that needed repairing and got to his feet.

But it was nearly noon before he got around to fence fixing, and then he had but one wire stapled when he heard a "halloo" and, turning, saw old Jason Southby hobbling across the field toward him.

Jimmy, who was holding the wire for his father, let go the pliers and joined Stella who was trying to capture a bumble bee in a fruit jar.

"Howdy," said old Jason, reaching the fence. "Got a couple of helpers, I see."

Mr. Tapping smiled and nodded his greeting.

"I came over to ask if you're goin' to post your property for no huntin' this year."

"Don't think so," replied Mr. Tapping. "Aren't many grouse, and I don't expect there'll be many hunters."

"No," agreed old Jason, "the birds are dyin' out. It ain't like the old days."

Mr. Tapping nodded.

"Remember when Maudsley was here. Things was different then."

"Who did you say?" said Mr. Tapping.

"Maudsley," repeated old Jason. "He owned your farm twenty . . . thirty years ago."

Mr. Tapping shook his head. Maudsley, eh? Jimmy and Stella must have heard the name from one of the neighbors' children.

"Yep," continued old Jason. "Maudsley had this place, and Trask rented the strip across the road."

"So?"

"Quite a story about them two."

Mr. Tapping said nothing. There would be no hurrying old

Jason; and no stopping him either. The man obviously had a tale to tell, and he was enjoying every moment of this prelude. He bit off a piece of plug tobacco, chewed a moment and spat.

"It was corn that started it," he said. "Maudsley was a great one to fool around with hybrids, and he worked out an early variety he called Maudsley Number Two. That ain't bein' planted any more, but in those days it was well thought of."

"Then Trask moved into the farm across the road. Trask was from down south, from around New Orleans way, and he was fired up with all sorts of backwoods stuff. Pretty soon he began to fight with Maudsley about how good his hybrid corn was. Seems Trask believed the only way to grow good crops was by usin' voodoo spells. Got so them two couldn't come into sight of each other without startin' an argument. One day Trask got so mad he let his cattle loose in Maudsley's cornfield. That settled it. Maudsley headed for Trask's place, armed with a double-barreled shotgun. But before he got there, Trask made himself invisible."

"He did what?" demanded Mr. Tapping.

"Well, anyway, that's the story Maudsley spread around. Funny thing is, folks believed him. He said Trask, bein' from New Orleans country, knew all sorts of voodoo spells, and he said that Trask, bein' afraid, had cast a spell over himself to make himself vanish. 'Course some persons were suspicious and the sheriff asked Maudsley some questions. But Maudsley proved his shotgun hadn't been fired, and no one had seen him commit any crime. Trask was never seen around these parts again. After that Maudsley got to actin' sorta queer: lookin' over his shoulder, talkin' to himself. Then one day he up and cleared out, and the next anything was heard of him he had moved south to New Orleans, the very place Trask had come from. Maudsley is still down there; he wouldn't come back even long enough to

complete the sale of his farm." Jason's voice died off as he reached the end of his story.

"Did you hear what he said?" said Jimmy in a low voice.

"Sure." Stella rose triumphant from capturing her bumble bee. "I knew it all the time."

It rained the next night and even with the spyglass Jimmy could see nothing in the cornfields. But he knew the two scarecrows were out there, and he could imagine them standing in the rain with beads of water dripping from their hats. The muddy water would be running in rivulets between the rows of shocked corn and when the lightning flashed the shocks would gleam dully like so many stacked guns at an army encampment.

Next day after lunch Jimmy drew his sister aside.

"If you don't tell anybody I'll show you the present I've got for Mr. Maudsley. Promise?"

"I promise," said Stella.

Jimmy led the way into the barn and in the rear near one of the horse stalls, swept aside a covering of hay. He picked up a long rusty knife and displayed it with an air of pride. Stella was disappointed.

"Just an old knife."

"It's a voodoo knife, that's what it is. See the way the handle is carved."

Stella looked and saw a yellowed handle of what once might have been ivory, carved in the shape of a running goat with several quasi-human faces low down near the hilt.

"What are you going to do with it?" she said.

"I told you. Give it to Mr. Maudsley. It's his."

"How do you know it's his?"

"This is Mr. Maudsley's barn, isn't it? Besides, it was near his other stuff."

Stella was not enthusiastic. "Papa won't like it. He got mad

when you nailed that pie-tin to Mr. Maudsley's hand."

"Papa won't know a thing about it. Come on."

It was hot in the cornfield. The morning sun beat down fiercely and the air smelled of damp earth. The ground between the rows of stubble was marked with tiny channels that running water had cut the night before. But the shocks were dry again and in the slight breeze they whispered and rustled gently. The two children made a bee-line for the center of the field until they came to the two cross boards that served as a framework for the scarecrow.

The scarecrow was fashioned of some old clothing which had once belonged to a fat man—overalls, a coat that might have been a Sunday suit at one time, and an ancient felt hat—castaways which the children had found in the barn. The cardboard face, marked in black crayon, a little blurred now from the rain, had been copied by Jimmy from an old photograph the boy had come upon among some old papers when he had cleaned out the attic. Jimmy had decided that even a crow wouldn't be fooled by a faceless scarecrow.

Jimmy was about to climb the upright shaft when Stella stopped him.

"Wait," she said. "Let's not give Mr. Maudsley the knife."

"Why not? It's his."

"Let's give it to Mr. Trask."

The boy's jaw dropped as the enormity of the idea grew upon him. Then he uttered a squeal of delight.

Laughing and giggling, the two children turned and ran down the aisle of shocks to the road and vaulted the fence that enclosed the adjacent field.

Five minutes later the second scarecrow brandished a knife at the end of one of its handleless sleeves.

But as Jimmy came out on the road again, he looked across

at Mr. Maudsley. In full view in the sunlight, it wasn't a cardboard face now; it was a round full face, with great folds of fat, and it was twisted in an expression of stark fear.

For three nights the skies over the Tapping farm were black, and a cold wind huffing down from the north kept the children indoors where they played parchesi. On the fourth night the moon broke through the clouds.

Jimmy, squatting by the window, the spyglass to his eye, stared out at the two scarecrows. At intervals he thought he saw Mr. Trask descend from the mounting pole, leap up over the shocks and begin his strange dance. But at the instant those capers began, the clouds always managed to blot out the light, and the boy never could be sure if it was a trick of his eye or the glass.

And then Jimmy observed two things. With him in his gyrations Mr. Trask carried the knife, and as he darted back and forth, he edged almost imperceptibly toward Mr. Maudsley.

The boy watched a long time to confirm his fears. Then he turned and ran to his sister's room.

"Mr. Trask is getting closer," he said. "You'd better come see."

At the window Stella spent several moments focusing the glass. Slowly her body went rigid, and she uttered a hoarse exclamation.

"He's going to kill Mr. Maudsley."

The boy nodded, his eyes shining with terror.

"We've got to try and stop him!"

She turned and ran down the stairs and through the lower floor rooms to the back door. Jimmy ran after her. Crossing the yard, they sped halfway down the lane, then pushed through the cedar windbreak and veered toward the cornfield. Pumpkins, golden in the moonlight, rose up on either side as they raced up the indine.

Suddenly Stella drew up short. "Look!"

Mr. Trask had crossed the road and now was coming full tilt through the row of shocks. Jimmy, arms spread wide, threw himself forward to block the onrushing figure's path. He had a brief impression of a blurred shadow bowling toward him and passing through him while he struck out with his small fists ineffectually. Behind there was a ripping of cloth and a hoarse scream.

Stella came running to where Jimmy stood. Together they saw two shadows locked in an incredible embrace. Like a scythe raised aloft, Mr. Trask's knife swept downward in a wide arc and with a quick stroke cut off Mr. Maudsley's head. Mr. Maudsley's hat flew up, Mr. Maudsley's head rolled off, and a thin cry of triumph welled up and faded.

And then there was nothing, except that Mr. Trask was back on one side of the fence, and Mr. Maudsley was on the other, minus his head, of course.

"Geel!" said Stella.

"Golly!" said Jimmy. He ran over to pick up Mr. Maudsley's hat; Jimmy tried to put Mr. Maudsley's head back but somehow it wouldn't stick.

"We'll fix it in the morning," said Jimmy.

At the edge of the field Jimmy paused and caught his sister's arm anxiously. "You won't tell, Stella?"

"No, of course not."

"Cross your heart . . . ?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die"

It was night of the the next day and the children sat playing parchesi. Mrs. Tapping was knitting. Mr. Tapping, settled back in the platform rocker, was reading the newspaper aloud, as was his custom. Outside, Mr. Trask was in one field, and Mr. Maudsley was in the other; his head was back in place, but only tied

on—it was not the same; it looked very dead, even though Jimmy and Stella had done their best.

"Any news?" asked Mrs. Tapping.

"Same old stuff. New taxes, one of them foreign countries talkin' big and threatenin' war," said Mr. Tapping. "One thing here, though—they found a fellow with his head cut off right in the middle of a city street."

"My land! Not here in Akerstown?"

Mr. Tapping laughed. "Lord, no! Happened way down in New Orleans."

The Martian Calendar

Hathaway wasn't exactly sick when he took over the sea house that June; but his recent illness had left its mark, and at thirty-eight he had changed from comparative youth to a grey-haired old man.

It was in the hope of revitalizing himself that he had selected this place at the head of Cooper's Cove. The house was completely modern. The grounds—roughly ten acres including the lower beach—were almost a unit in themselves, cut off by walls of unscalable granite; and there was a boathouse containing a dory, a catboat, and an inboard cruiser with which he could pass the long summer afternoons.

Only one feature marred the location. Perched like an eyrie at the top of the cliff, the house was separated from the beach by a staircase of seventy-nine steps, which in Hathaway's condition loomed an impossible barrier.

So it was not until mid-July, when he had regained some of his strength, that he saw the wreckage of the space ship at close range.

At beach level, however, Hathaway was disappointed. The ship, or what was left of it, looked puny and fragile, serving only to give credence to the stories he had been told before his arrival. Out there, resting precariously against a spine of granite, an up-ended black hull lay half submerged in the water like some

giant robot's discarded toy. Green waves washed over it and sunlight glinted on its metal surface.

Two years ago Dr. Judson Ward, the former owner of the sea house, had taken off for Mars from this cliffside in that one-man vessel. What had happened was a matter of question. The world said Ward had ingloriously crashed in the cove after flying a distance of six hundred feet. Ward said he had left almost nine months before and that the bad landing, due to an error in navigation, had been made on his return.

At any rate he had survived the wreck. After his broken leg had mended, he had opened the second floor of the boathouse, displaying there a collection of alien artifacts which he insisted he had gathered during his stay on the red planet.

But the public didn't believe, the house was too remote, and the project ended in failure.

Now on this July morning Hathaway peered thoughtfully across the water at the wreckage. Turning, he retraced his steps to the white-painted boathouse, made his way out "on" the pier, and climbed the outside stairs to the structure's second floor.

The boathouse smelled of tar, wet rope and bilge water. He threw open the north window to the sea breeze and turned to Judson Ward's collection which was spread over five large tables along the walls.

If Ward had been a charlatan, as everybody said, he was certainly gifted with an active imagination. The collection looked like a surrealist's nightmare. There was a star-shaped piece of black plastic with a hole through its center that constantly changed color: from red to yellow, to violet, and back to red again. There was a thin-sided thing that resembled a coffee can but was so heavy Hathaway couldn't lift it from the table. There was a long elliptical cylinder covered with soft fur with an eye

at one end that blinked when you touched it. And there was the calendar!

The lower section of the calendar was a large ten-inch date-pad, commonplace except that the sheets were not divided into months but numbered consecutively, one through 687. Above the pad was a picture set deep in a wide metal frame. The picture showed a green meadow surrounded by a split-rail fence with several trees in the background and grouped lazily in the shade a dozen or more black and white cows.

No canals . . .

No red desert . . .

It struck Hathaway that this wasn't a Martian scene at all.

He picked up the calendar to examine it more closely; a whirl of gears sounded, and a number of date sheets dislodged and fell to the floor. Simultaneously a curious change took place in the picture. Clouds formed and zig zag streaks of lightning leaped across the painted sky. By seconds the scene in the frame grew darker; rain began to fall, and the cows huddled together for protection. At the same time a small oblong at the bottom of the panel opened and words appeared: *Forecast—Thunderstorms—Cooler.*

Hathaway replaced the calendar on the table. It was odd how far the human intellect would go when it attempted to support a contention.

Early next morning he got out the jeep and drove to Beachertown, the nearby village, to replenish supplies. He made his purchases: groceries, paint brush, and a caulking knife for work on the catboat and headed up the lonely road home. He was turning the hairpin bend before the sharp ascent that led to the sea house when the air above the rocky shoulder appeared to stagger momentarily, then settle back into position, as if a sheet of glass had been hung by the side of the road and someone moved

that glass to and fro. Almost, he mused, as if the space-time element—or whatever they called it—were out of juxtaposition.

Hathaway passed a hand over his eyes, and the effect faded away.

Reaching the sea house, he went into the kitchen and prepared lunch. For some reason the cream had soured and he had to drink his coffee black; but when he went out on the veranda his good spirits returned. Below him stretched the cove with its ellipse of beach and emerald waves creaming up on the sand. Far out to sea a triangle of white sail showed, and near the end of the promontory curlews soared and dived in the clear sunlight.

For half an hour he sat there, idly turning the pages of a magazine; then something caught his eye on the lower shore. It was a man clad in a light-colored suit, Panama hat and white shoes, striding along the beach close to the water's edge.

Hathaway smoked a denicotinized cigar while he mused over who the stranger might be or how he had come there. He watched him walk as far as the granite wall, occasionally stopping to skip a flat stone over the water, then retrace his steps toward the boat-house. A sudden storm, rising without warning from the southwest, drove Hathaway from the veranda then; and in the rush of closing windows against the wind, he forgot the matter. But he did remember the Martian calendar, and as thunder growled and lightning hopscotched across the sky, he had to admit grudgingly that the gadget had been correct in its predictions.

In the morning, as he stood by the window to do his limited daily dozen, he again saw the man in white on the lower beach. This time he gave in to curiosity and, hurrying down the high steps, came up to the stranger by the boat house.

"You're on private property, you know," he said, coldly. "And if you don't mind, I'd like to know how the devil you got here."

The man was a good deal taller than he had appeared from

above. He was in his early thirties with a round bland face and dark pleasant-appearing eyes. His mouth was crinkled at the corners as if he were constantly on the verge of smiling.

"There's a trail of sorts over there," he said, pointing. "But I'm sorry, if I got you down here just to tell me I'm trespassing.

"I come this way every other day or so," he continued, "Name's Cranston . . . Nigel Cranston. I've got a small place on the other side of the cove. By the way," he added as if on impulse, "what have you done with Judson Ward's collection?"

Hathaway nodded toward the boathouse. "It's still in there."

"Mind if I take a look at it again? Ward was a queer one; but when it came to inventiveness, he was sheer genius."

Hathaway shrugged and led the way out the narrow pier. In the second floor room of the boathouse he stood by the door while Cranston moved past the collection, picking up one article after another.

Even in these simple movements there was a free flowing grace about the stranger that Hathaway at once disliked and envied. He couldn't help but contrast it with his own movements which since his illness had become stiff and clumsy.

Cranston moved from table to table, mumbling comments over the various articles. At last he stood before the calendar.

"Isn't that the damndest thing?" he said.

"It seems to be accurate at any rate," said Hathaway. "It forecast rain for yesterday, and we had rain."

"Day before yesterday," corrected Cranston. "Yes, Judson Ward would see to that. He was quite a mathematician, you know, among other things, and calendars were his hobby."

"So?"

"He had some crazy idea that the Gregorian calendar which we use today is but little better than the Julian calendar or the

ancient Egyptian, and that all three of them are inferior to the system perfected by the Mayans."

"He probably made this thing to prove his point," suggested Hathaway.

"I don't think so." Cranston turned the frame panel over, pushed open a sliding cover and examined the mechanism-filled interior with a fountain-pen flashlight. "The date pad has numbered sheets to 687, which is equivalent to the number of days in the Martian year. You'll note too that some of the date sheets show two moons, and that too is in agreement with the moons of Mars, Phobos and Deimos. Have you seen the writing on the back of this panel?"

Hathaway shook his head. "What does it say?"

"It says: *'Item 16. Calendar. Found in the Temple of Nar ruins, Faye-Empo City, approximately forty-eight kilometers from landing site. Martian guide refused to touch it as he claimed it belonged to an upper caste Canalian, the legendary mystic race of the south desert country. According to guide, calendar has the ability to adjust its mechanism to be in accord with its surroundings.'*"

Cranston sighed. "Imagine Ward making all this stuff just to support his claim that he had been to Mars. He must have had intentions of getting there once though. That space ship out there is the real article."

"Did anyone see him crash?" asked Hathaway.

"No. A couple of early fishermen arrived just in time to prevent him from drowning. About this calendar . . . I'll give you twenty dollars for it."

"It's not for sale," said Hathaway.

Cranston did not ask again. He glanced once more at the inside mechanism, stood off and surveyed the pastoral scene in the

panel and a few minutes later took his leave. Hathaway watched him go out the door, lightly descend the staircase and walk briskly across the beach.

On a morning a week later Hathaway, a basket under his arm headed down a path into that district known as the East Woods. He had discovered the path some days ago and found that it led to a glade deep in the pines where blueberries grew in abundance.

As he strode along he thought over his life at the sea house. Each morning, it seemed, his days of rest and relaxation were paying off. He awoke with renewed vigor and a feeling of slowly returning youth, but by midafternoon his exuberance had passed and as the hours wore on toward evening he began to feel exhausted again.

Hathaway felt the stubble on his chin. There must be a certain quality too to the sea air that was conducive to growth. For years he had been a shave-every-other-day man; now seemingly as a part of the disturbed time that was effecting the entire property, a single cutting of his beard every twenty-four hours was not enough.

He reached the glade and began filling his basket. He worked slowly, enjoying the warmth of sunlight that filtered down through the trees and the balsam fragrance that filled his lungs like a tonic. Absently he noticed one patch where the berries were larger and more attractive than any other place. When he had been here before the patch had been green and undeveloped. It was odd, he thought, that it should have ripened in so short a time. Just one more facet of the mixed-up time element Hathaway had noticed.

Later he was enjoying a bowl of the berries at lunch on the veranda when a shadow fell across his table. Cranston stood on the veranda steps.

"Well, how's every little thing?" he said, entering and dropping into a chair.

Hathaway frowned in annoyance. "I feel fine."

"Glad to hear it. I thought you looked a trifle seedy yesterday, but that's beside the point. I stopped by to see if you had changed your mind about selling Ward's collection." Cranston drew out his wallet. "Fifty dollars and you can keep all except the calendar. That's all I care for."

"Sorry," said Hathaway. "It's not for sale."

"But it isn't doing you any good there in the boathouse."

"It's not for sale," said Hathaway again.

Cranston closed his wallet with a sigh and returned it to his pocket. "Okay," he smiled pleasantly. "No harm in asking." After that he asked Hathaway to show him through the house, left a half hour later. When he had gone Hathaway got out his sprinkling can and began watering the tea roses which Judson Ward had let run wild. The flowers, however, were not of good quality. Like other things effected by time around the sea house, they seemed to stay in bloom only a short time before they withered and died.

That afternoon Hathaway continued his reading of Stegor's *A Self Reliant Man*. But his attention was half divided and he was wondering what Cranston could possibly want with the calendar when an errant thought struck him.

Suppose there was a value to the calendar he was not aware of. Suppose . . .

On impulse he descended to the boathouse. At the second floor door he drew up.

Someone apparently had tampered with the lock. A heavy implement had been jimmied under the hasp and pried upward, gouging the wood. The staple had held. Whether or not the

marks were of recent origin Hathaway could not tell, but a single name rose before his eyes with damning finalty . . . Cranston. Who else would come here . . . would have access to the beach . . . ?

Fists clenched, Hathaway stood there a long moment while anger swept through him. The nerve of the man . . . to believe he could get by with this. Hathaway let himself in the room and raised the window blind.

The picture in the calendar had changed. The dark overcast sky and the rain had given way to clear skies and bright sunshine. The cows were contentedly chewing their cuds, and below in the little oblong, words said, *Fair and warmer.*

He carried the calendar to the window, slid open the cover in back and squinted down at the internal mechanism. It was like nothing he had ever seen before: odd shaped bits of metal separated by small globes of transparent material, a world of minute circular and elliptical cogs and gears. He probed with his pencil at a series of plastic protective caps. And then his lips pursed in a low whistle.

Hathaway was no scientist, but he knew enough geology to recognize five Loren-Sedgemore crystals of approximately 250 milligrams each, unadulterated, ground and polished. Crystals first discovered spectroscopically in a reflected light analysis of Mars. Crystals whose power or intrinsic value had never been determined but whose number on Earth stood at a scant three hundred.

And Cranston had offered him fifty dollars for it!

Can't leave it here, he thought. Can't leave a thing with so much potential value alone in a boathouse with a man like Cranston around. There was no telling how much official circles would offer for the calendar when it was known it contained these crystals . . .

He found a piece of sailcloth, carefully wrapped it about the

calendar and carried it back to the house where he stored it on the top shelf of his bedroom closet.

The following day, being low again in supplies, he drove once more to Beachertown. As usual the night's sleep had done much to refresh him, and he was in good spirits until he entered the hardware store. There a grizzled oldster nodded and addressed him from around the stem of a blackened pipe.

"Hear you've taken over the Judson Ward place," he said. "Met your neighbor yet?"

"Cranston, you mean?"

"Mighty nice feller."

"I'm not so sure," Hathaway said, his eyes glinting "I think he's a crook. He tried to break into my place yesterday." Instantly he was sorry he had said that.

The man puffed a cloud of smoke. "Shoh, you must be mistaken. Cranston wouldn't do that. He's a nice young feller."

Hathaway bought a can of varnish and some nails and after cruising idly around the town, headed for home. When he turned into the hairpin bend he experienced the same sensation of shifting air before his windshield. He put on his glasses but the optical effect continued until he reached the sea house.

Twenty minutes after he entered, he felt sure that someone had been there during his absence. That it must have been Cranston and that he must have been after the calendar Hathaway was positive. Hatred for the man now swept over him like a cloud. He hated his smooth familiarity, his selfconfidence, his apparent perfect health. Hathaway thought of his own immediate past when, before his illness, he would have rolled roughshod over such a person without even troubling to learn his identity.

He drummed his knuckles thoughtfully on a table. So Cranston wanted the calendar, did he. Well, maybe the way should be made easier for him to get it. A hard smile passed across Hath-

away's face. He went into the bedroom, took down the calendar and removed the sailcloth covering. Holding it so that it clearly could be seen, he descended to the boathouse, sure that prying eyes, perhaps aided by binoculars, were watching him.

He entered and after a moment's consideration hung the panel on a peg on the wall. From a tool chest by the door he took a bench saw, a coil of wire, and a pair of pliers. Then he crossed over to a raised platform where the compact light-plant that served the house was banging away noisily. After a moment's search he found the automatic cut-off and pushed it to the side so that the motor would run continuously. Ten minutes later a well-concealed wire ran up from the spark plug to the metal frame of the calendar. With the saw Hathaway cut partly through the wooden railing which separated the second floor gallery from the center well that looked down on open water and the three boats below.

Finished, he stood back and visualized what would happen when Cranston entered. He would reach for the calendar, come into contact with the high voltage wires from the light plant motor, throwing him against the railing, which, weakened by the saw, would give way and drop him into the open water below. A rather contrived but harmless trick which would teach Cranston a lesson and show that he wasn't dealing with a fool.

For the rest of the day Hathaway was in good spirits. He cooked and ate his dinner and played endless games of solitaire. Once, late in the evening, he thought he heard a short muffled cry from the direction of the lower beach. The sound was not repeated.

In the morning he deliberately waited until after breakfast before going down to the boathouse. As he had expected the door stood open; and he could see the splintered railing within.

An instant later Hathaway rocked backward as a strangled cry rose to his lips. Down in the well a huddled shape was half in the

water, half draped grotesquely across the prow of the catboat. It was Cranston. His white shirt was stained crimson, and protruding from the front of it was a jagged foot-long splinter of wood.

The significance of what had happened filtered into Hathaway slowly. What he had meant to be a harmless prank had resulted in murder—premeditated murder! Slow panic welled over him.

He looked about wildly, as if expecting accusing eyes on all sides. He stood there swaying, jaw agape, while cold perspiration oozed out on him. Ice ran up and down his spine.

With an effort he steeled his nerves and forced himself to think rationally.

With no witnesses to dispute his word, who was to say that Cranston had not met his death by accident? Assuming the sawed-through railing were not noticed—and he could fix it so it wouldn't be—the authorities, when they came, would see nothing but the results of an unfortunate tragedy that was the fault of no one.

He waited to quiet his pounding heart, then began to remove the wire from the calendar and the electric light plant. He had a bad moment when at close range he looked down upon Cranston's body, and for an instant he fancied the dead man's lips moved, trying to speak to him. But a second glance assured him the victim was beyond help. Hathaway got a hatchet out of the tool box and worked several minutes on the railing, making the break appear to be a natural one. Then he went up to the sea house to call the sheriff.

In the absence of witnesses the inquest was a routine if sordid affair. A few villagers attended along with the victim's sister, his only relative, and the family practitioner of Beachertown. It ended with the statement: Death as the result of an accident, and after a few days life at Cooper's Cove settled down to normalcy. Yet a nervous tension gripped Hathaway, and he could not sup-

press the feeling that he moved on the brink of some special event.

To quiet himself he took the motor cruiser for a short run out beyond the cove into the rolling swells of the Atlantic. Fighting the heavy seas, exposing himself to the salt spray cleared his brain for a time, but as he nudged the craft back into its mooring in the boathouse, the uneasiness returned. With it came a sudden urge to look once again at the calendar.

The picture in the panel was unchanged. Or was it? Hathaway thought for a moment he detected something else, a shifting of the background like the strange optical illusion he had noticed at the curve of the road on the way to Beachertown. But it was a fleeting effect, and reaching upward he took the calendar down and carried it to the window.

He slid open the sliding panel in back and looked down upon the five Loren-Sedgemore crystals, each with its protective cap. Abruptly he drew from his pocket a clasp knife and began to work away at the base of one of the crystals. He had it partially loosened on one side when suddenly there was a whir from inside the box like a released spring and a metallic grinding. There was a violet flash of flame, and Hathaway jerked his hand backward with his fingers tingling. Swearing, he closed the panel again and turned the calendar over.

As he peered down he saw that something had happened to the picture too. Singularly lacking in movement, there was a death-like rigidity about the cows in the meadow now, a breathlessness about the background that seemed to suggest the picture was in a state of suspended animation.

Down in the lower panel where the forecast had appeared, the oblong space had been replaced by an unmarked black surface.

There was no familiar ticking sound. The clock work mechanism was silent . . .

He spent a restless night, dreaming wild dreams of entering

that meadow in the calendar and then finding it impossible to leave. The dreams were a prediction. When in late morning he headed for Beachertown, the jeep proceeded sluggishly to the limit of his property and there halted. Hathaway got out, opened the hood and probed at the engine. At the end of five minutes he gave up in disgust and set off down the road at a walk. But he had not gone a dozen yards when that optical effect staggered the air about him. This time the sensation was a hundred times more severe, the road appearing to double within itself and extend into the distance in layers. Vertigo seized him; he halted, swaying.

The faulty vision—if indeed that's what it was—made it impossible for him to go on. He made his way back to the sea house where, as soon as he reached the veranda, the sensation passed. Though he had been gone a scant twenty minutes the moment he entered the living room he got the impression that someone had been there during his absence. And mad though it was, he could not repress the thought that the intruder was Cranston.

But Cranston was dead!

Yes, Cranston was dead. Hathaway smiled when he thought of how completely he had pulled the wool over the sheriff's eyes, how he had outwitted the corner at the inquest. The railing had been given only a cursory examination, and no one had questioned his implication of an accident. He thought also of the Martian calendar and how it had changed his life during the past days. And he thought of the Sedgemore crystals and what he would do with the money when he sold them. Buy another house—in the city probably. No, not a house, not in the immediate future at any rate. He had had enough of living alone.

Abruptly there stole over him a mental cloud, dulling his perception, leaving him in a kind of dream world wherein his movements were stiff and mechanical. Like some metal-jointed robot

he rose slowly to his feet, left the veranda and descended the steps to the boathouse. As he opened the door and stepped across the threshold he saw the calendar still hanging on its peg on the far wall. He stood there, gazing at it, eyes unblinking, hands hanging stiffly at his sides. Then, a step at a time, he crossed to the tool box, took out saw, pliers and wire. That his actions now were completely repetitive he was fully aware; yet he completely lacked the mental and physical stamina to change them. He hooked the wire to the light plant motor, led it concealed up the metal frame of the calendar and cut partly through the railing with the saw. After that he left the boathouse and climbed to the sea house.

His brain was whirling. Was he going mad or was this some wild dream from which he would awaken to laugh at his fears?

As the day slowly waned, he sat on the veranda, playing endless games of solitaire; he won and he lost. He played "Canfield," "four-corner-build-up," "English Joker," and "King in the Counting House." At the completion of each game he flip-shuffled with all the dexterity of a practiced gambler. Yet with each turn of the cards he realized as through a mental veil that he had played those identical cards in their identical positions once before.

At five o'clock he cooked and ate his supper. And here again, as he munched fried chicken, celery and olives and drank coffee, he was aware that his actions were completely repetitive. As darkness set in, he returned to his solitaire games, playing without pause until shortly after nine o'clock when a muffled cry from the lower beach cut through the warm summer night. Hathaway listened, but the sound was not repeated.

In the morning he deliberately waited until after breakfast before going down to the boathouse.

All the way down the high stairs he was conscious of a sense of brooding disaster, of a cloak of gloom that wrapped itself

slowly and tightly about him. He found himself counting the steps as he descended: fifty-five, fifty-six, fifty-seven. As he approached the boathouse an overpowering repugnance held him back.

At the boathouse door he came to a halt, hands and legs trembling, while his brain spun crazily, rejecting answers. Was it not true that life moved along a circular channel and eventually passed the same mileposts it had moved by a previous time? Did not some scientists postulate that space time progressed in a series of gigantic arcs, revolving from a common hub, from the curve of which another curve could be seen in complete similarity?

Hathaway's hand moved toward the door latch. But even before he swung the door slowly open he knew too what he would find inside. And he knew too what he would find when he opened the door on the morrow; the hideous horror which would confront him, the senseless tragedy which would wring his soul, the terrible moments and hours of that terrible period in his life which would be repeated again . . . and again . . . and again . . .

The Corbie Door

On the eighteenth of June I received word from my solicitor that the final papers had been signed and everything was ready for my occupancy of Corbie House. The long months of litigation over my uncle's estate were thus at an end, and there was no longer the necessity of spending the sultry months in a Bloomsbury flat, a project which, considering the delicate condition of my wife's health, had loomed as an ordeal.

Debora and I acted at once. We closed up the flat; I arranged to have young Ames take over my business until further notice; and we caught the 4:30 train for Langham. Until the train rolled out of Paddington we were in good spirits, buoyant with the expectancy of a new life. Then the sky became overcast and a drizzle of rain began to fall. Debora's mood, always susceptible to weather changes, dampened perceptibly.

"How long has the house been closed?" she asked suddenly, and added, "Perhaps the roof leaks."

I laughed. "I think you'll find the roof quite solid. Uncle Charles lived all his life in Corbie House until his health forced him to move two years ago. Besides, I've wired ahead to the caretaker to have things ready for us."

I drowsed the rest of the way until the train pulled into Langham. The station was not an impressive one, but the village

which lay just beyond, its central street running in a curious ellipse, looked quite cheerful with its many lights gleaming through the mist. The caretaker was there to meet us, a heavy-set Lancashireman, seemingly as old as his car.

He greeted us in a dull toneless voice and offered no further comment during the half hour's ride that followed. In the darkness with only the dim lights from the old car to light the twisting road, I saw no landmarks to touch a responsive chord in my memory. There were ugly drainage ditches where I had expected stately columns of trees, and rough granite outcroppings where I had pictured broad fields and meadows. Still, almost thirty years had passed since I had been here, and childhood recollections, I knew, were apt to be fleeting. Then the car drew up, and the driver said shortly, "Here we are, sir. Corbie House."

The manor house, however, was much as I remembered it; a quadrangular structure of mixed Tudor and Jacobean architecture, with mullioned windows, octagonal towers, and fantastic chimneys. Those chimneys—the correct counting of which had always bedeviled me as a youngster—seemed to stand even higher now, outlined as they were against the grey-black sky.

Inside, the walls were all paneled in the Gothic style, and the ceilings presented some fine examples of Florentine and Siennese fresco painting, which apparently had dulled but little in the more than four centuries that had passed. There was dust in some of the darker corners, and a pile of furniture jackets near the doorway showed that the place had been given a hasty and desultory cleaning.

Memories came flooding down upon me as we passed through the silent rooms. I was glad to see that Uncle Charles, while maintaining to a remarkable degree the period authenticity of the structure, had not hesitated to install modern conveniences. There were electric lights, baths with showers, and even a telephone.

Debora had scarcely time to select one of the smaller chambers for our room when a ring at the bell announced a visitor. He rushed in almost as I turned the latch, seized my hand and began pumping it up and down.

"I'm Eldridge," he said breezily. "Dennison Eldridge. Live in the village, you know. Your caretaker told me you were coming down. Awfully glad. I shouldn't have barged in on you before you had a chance to settle, I know. But I'm so very much interested in this house I just had to."

He was a tall gangly man of about thirty with receding mouse-colored hair and a cleft chin. His eyes avoided my gaze in the nervous way some persons have, and noting this, I put him down as an introvert of the first water. A rather unstable fellow too, I judged, for what other would choose such a time for a call.

"Yes," he went on, "this house has been a hobby of mine for more than a year. Your Uncle Charles didn't care for the idea, though, Testy old gentleman."

I was a little short with Eldridge, but for politeness sake I did ask him what in particular interested him about this house. At that, he looked at me over the match with which he was lighting his pipe, until the flame touched his fingertips.

"You mean you don't know?" he said slowly.

"Know what?"

Quickly he lit another match. "Oh nothing in particular. A few legends, some old wives' tales. I'll tell you about them sometime."

But there was an odd look in his eyes as a quarter of an hour later he took up his tweed cap and went out the door.

"I'll be back in a day or so," he said. "And I shall probably be rather a pest from then on."

He went swinging off into the rainy darkness accompanied by the caretaker. I had asked the latter to stay on as a servant, for

a time at least, but the man had quietly refused, explaining that he had other duties.

Our first night in the manor was thus spent alone. Debora and I retired early, but I lay awake for hours as usual, unable to court sleep. I wondered if this change of environment would be of benefit to my wife. Her attitude of mind had concerned me during recent months. It was not so much the things she did as it was her failure to concord with me in the conception of things we both saw. There was the matter of the button on my waistcoat, for one thing. It was forever turning bluish in color, probably from the effects of a cheap dye. But she would insist with an odd strained sort of insistence that it was the same as the others.

Finally I dropped off, only to awaken suddenly just before dawn. The manor was steeped in silence, and the only sound was the rapid ticking of Debora's traveling-clock. The night breeze billowed inward the drapes of the open casement.

For several moments I lay there, wide awake and unmoving. Then I got up, put on a pair of slippers and paced to the window. Below, the grounds were tessellated in shadow and, save for a distant croaking of frogs, a deep hush lay over the countryside. But although the house was silent now, the impression persisted that I had been awakened by a cry from somewhere in the recesses of these halls. And although I had no way of being sure, I was certain that that cry had been a woman's scream.

The following morning I called London and made arrangements to have three servants sent to Corbie House. The agency promised to have a cook, a serving maid, and a general man at the manor by nightfall. This done, I proceeded to make a survey of the grounds.

They were in a wild and neglected state. On the south side

the one-time broad lawn was overrun with gorse, and here stood the remnants of a large three-tier fountain. Scattered about were a dozen or more statues. Most of these images were in a state of decay; heads were missing on some; on others arms and legs had broken off; and all were crude likenesses of Roman deities. Their presence puzzled me, for although the manor might conceivably have been erected on Roman ruins, it was, of course, impossible to believe these images dated to such a remote period. Leading away from the fountain was a double row of tall stately columns. Each of these had been surmounted by a stone corbie, but the majority of the bird images had long ago fallen from their perches and lay shattered and half buried in the rank undergrowth.

Shortly before noon I came upon a large door opening into the side wall. I stood staring at it, a huge barrier constructed of weathered bronze, with great laxl-hammered hinges. On either panel was carved a life-size corbie, entwined with what was apparently mistletoe, and in the center, partially obliterated, was a small death's head. The door was a full inch smaller than its frame, suggesting that it had been taken from some other part of the house and mounted here as a makeshift.

I opened it. Before me stretched two narrow passages, both curving inward toward a common center and fashioned of very old stone. I switched on a pocket flash and entered the right hand passage. Sixty steps, and I was back where I had started. The two corridors were nothing more than a complete circle, beginning and ending at the door.

There seemed no reason for such a passage. But as I stood there, gazing back at it, I caught myself growing tense again. It was fancy, of course, nothing more; yet for an instant I thought I had heard from far off the wavering cry of a woman in mortal agony.

When I returned to the house I found Debora in an uneasy

state. She had spent the morning dusting and rearranging the furniture of some of the lower floor rooms. In the library she had glanced at several books, all of which were furnished in rich and costly bindings, and had read passages from a number of them.

"Robert," she said slowly, "these books are evil. We must get rid of them."

Macabre in subject matter, they certainly were. There was a copy of Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, Herzog's *Furchtbare Kulte*, an incomplete and heavily expurgated edition of deKorlette's *Cultes des Goules*, and several bound manuscripts which apparently were journals of the various masters of Corbie House. I saw then that it was these last that had disturbed Debora. Not journals in the true sense, but a series of badly-scrawled essays, all of them seemed to deal with a history of the Druids and the black rites of Druidic worship.

These essays began prosaically enough, but led into descriptions of the horrible sacrifices and pagan acts committed by the ancient Celts in pre-Norman conquest days. There were narratives so involved and so filled with festering horror I was led to believe the writers had not limited themselves to fact, but had set down the vagaries of what were undoubtedly diseased minds. This puzzled me somewhat, for though I knew practically nothing of Uncle Charlie's side of the family, neither was I aware of any mental variances on the part of his ancestors.

I returned the volumes to the shelves and sought to soothe my wife. At two p. m. the servants arrived. There were two instead of the three I had ordered. The man, a taciturn Scot of middle age, had apparently seen better days. The woman appeared efficient enough, but seemed emotionally disturbed over something.

Dinner that night was a rather unpleasant affair. The woman grumbled at being asked to start work before "she was decently settled"; and the man interrupted us rudely to demand he be

given a different room, though for the life of me I could see nothing wrong with the one he had. My wife complained of a headache and retired early, but I chose to stay up a while and read. I made the rounds of the lower floor rooms, locking the doors and securing the casements. I drank a glass of peach brandy which I had brought down from London and which for many years had been my favorite nightcap. Then I went into the library.

I chose Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* as a sleep tempter. For two chapters I read along, puffing a pipe, vaguely aware that I was becoming drowsy. Then my pipe went out, and I laid the book down to refill it. Suddenly I paused, listening. Save for the slow and methodical ticking of a pendulum clock somewhere, the great house was blanketed in silence. And yet again I had the impression that far off, at the limit of my hearing range, I had heard a woman's scream.

My first thought was for Debora. I went to her room, but a glance at the heavy canopied bed showed her sleeping peacefully. I returned to the library and heard it again even as I stepped through the doorway. Not imagination this time, but a definite cry that came from somewhere without the house. I let myself into the grounds, headed slowly across the wet flagstones in the direction of the ruined fountain. The rain had ceased, but a strong gusty wind still tossed the branches of the oak trees. Up in the eastern sky a full moon was scudding through the cloud wrack.

Presently I came upon the door, the presence of which had so puzzled me earlier in the day. It was open, though I remembered closing it when I left the circular passage. I moved to shut it, but even as my hand touched the ancient latch, a strange sensation stole over me. It was as though another will took control of my own and drew me forward into that passage. Like a sleepwalker

I found myself traversing the sixty steps, then emerging at the door again.

There I halted, staring. The scene before me was changed. No longer was the fountain a ruined ornament; it was a huge cromlech now, formed of two mighty slabs of stone resting horizontally, one upon the other. The statues were all restored, and in the moonlight their features were clear and sharp in detail. At my side the manor house wall was smooth and even, without trace of ivy or lichen, and beyond, the aisle of corbie columns seemed to have doubled its length, with the stone birds all on their perches. The weeds and underbrush too had given way to a smooth expanse of short cropped sward. Somewhere, rising and falling on the wind, the deep pealing of a bell reached my ears.

But the lure, the strange spell I had experienced on passing through the door still remained. Like a mental cloud, it blanketed all emotions save one, and that was the irresistible desire to move toward its source, which now seemed to emanate from the center of the aisle of columns. I paced forward, a step at a time, crossed the wide lawn. Black and curiously repelling in the moonlight, the stone corbics faced each other from their high mounts, their wings outspread, their beaks open, their eyes fixed on me. I had reached approximately the center of that aisle when abruptly I halted, aware in an uncertain way that I was being followed.

A shapeless mass of darker shadows swam into my vision then. The shadows resolved themselves into a procession of cowed figures moving slowly across the grounds toward me. Like a funeral cortege, with measured step, they advanced, and as they drew nearer it seemed that a man and woman were in the lead. All was vague and indistinct like a scene viewed through water, yet I saw the man was bearded with a stern countenance and

that he wore a brocaded jerkin over which was thrown a slashed tunic, girded at the waist by a jeweled belt from which hung a dagger. There were ruffles at his wrists, and his waistfront was ornamented with Spanish blackwork. The woman I could see even less distinctly, but her head was bowed low, and she wore a gable headdress, the lappet of which was edged with gold. There was something familiar about the woman, perhaps her hair which was copper-colored like Debra's.

Past me, without notice of my presence, the procession moved. That strange lure was almost overwhelming now, drawing me after them. We emerged from the corbie aisle, crossed a second expanse of sward, and began to climb a low rise, following a vague path. We entered a wood, swathed in gloom where the huge oak trees seemed to arrange themselves in corridors and galleries. I heard the bell again, and it was much nearer, coming apparently from a point just ahead. Abruptly the trees fell away into a circular glade. In the center was a large flat stone, the top and sides of which were covered with dark stains.

And now the cowed figures grouped themselves in a circle and began to sway gently from side to side until the entire throng was writhing in a fantastic dance. The scene seemed to shift and waver, now clear in detail, now blurred and shadowy like a negative seen alternately through bright and dim light. The man in the jerkin dragged the woman forward, prostrated himself before the stone and began to mumble an incantation. His voice was deep-pitched and resonant, yet it seemed to reach my ears from far off, as if it had crossed vast leagues of space.

On and on his voice droned. The cowed figures took up the litany, and the chanting rose louder and louder. All this time I had stood there, transfixed. Now as through the dimness I saw the man thrust the woman into an oval of moonlight and jerk the dagger from his belt I sought to cry out and lunge forward.

But my feet were dead things, anchored to the earth, and my throat seemed constricted.

A saffron-colored light appeared over the top surface of the stone. It coalesced slowly, leaving a film of radiance like a gauze curtain hanging there stationary. An instant later behind that film a squat bestial *Thing* crouched, leering down at the assembled throng. Like a multiple-headed gigantic toad, its cavernous mouths opened and closed, its lidless eyes reflecting all the evil that has confronted man from primordial times. As I gazed upon the abysmal entity evoked by that unholy incantation, horror seared deep into my soul.

The moonlight fell away and a great dark cloud blackened the heavens. Then the wind and the rain were upon me. Lightning flashes alternately etched the glade in blinding brilliance and pitch darkness.

By the light of those flashes I saw the man in the jerkin throw up his arms toward the thing on the stone in supplication. Grasping the woman by the hair, he plunged the dagger into her throat. The blood gouted outwards as she reeled back and crumpled to the ground. All was vague and uncertain in the intermittent light, possessing a nightmarish quality of unreality—all save the monstrous toad-like *Thing* which crouched on the stone slab. It slid down from the stone, groveled toward the woman, opening its multiple mouths.

Then the spell that held me was broken, and I turned and ran. I ran through the woods, down the aisle of corbie columns. Not until I reached the fountain did I draw up, heart pounding, gasping for breath.

Oblivious to the torrents of rain I stood there in a kind of stupor, clutching the ancient stonework for support. As my heart slowly quieted, a hundred unanswerable questions crowded down upon me.

I turned to head for the house. But at that instant over the rolling of the thunder, a sharp pistol-like report sounded high above. A terrific weight descended upon my skull, and I felt myself going down into unconsciousness.

When I opened my eyes, I was lying in bed, and Debora was bathing my wrists and brow with a wet cloth. Sunlight streamed through the Gothic windows.

"What happened?" I said, conscious of a dull ache in the back of my head.

She gave me a reassuring smile. "Nothing that won't mend, Robert, thank heaven. One of the oak-tree branches broke off during the storm and fell on you. Luckily my window was open, and I heard you cry out. But what were you doing on the grounds at that hour?"

All the horror of the preceding night came welling back to me, and for a moment I lay there without reply. Then, convincingly as I could, I explained that I had gone out to investigate an unusual sound, hoping that the matter would end there.

The matter didn't end there, however. By noon I felt sufficiently recovered to leave my bed, and, still a little shaky, continued the survey of my new possessions, I went down the wide, dark halls, examining carefully each room and anteroom, cataloguing in a little notebook each outstanding piece of furniture and exceptional piece of bric-a-brac that took my fancy, estimating their value and guessing at their age and origin. In this fashion I came upon a narrow rectangular room, opening off a short corridor which I somehow had overlooked, and entering it I saw at once that my inheritance was far richer than I supposed it to be. The walls of this room were almost covered with large portraits in oil, each of which was the work of a master and worth a fabulous amount. There were several Memlings,

Ghirlandaio, Carpaccios, a Raphael which might or might not have been authentic, and one or two Holbeins.

It was before a larger portrait that I stopped to stare with an incredulous eye. The nameplate read: *Portrait of Sir Edward Corbie, First Baronet Langham*. I had known, of course, that the line of the family originally owning the manor had been named Corbie, or as it was variously spelled, Corbee or Corbey. But what so disturbed me was this: Beyond a shadow of a doubt the figure in the painting was the man in the jerkin I had followed into the glade the night before.

Late that afternoon I went out into the grounds and saw the tree branch that had fallen upon me. It was a gnarled, massive length of wood, and the wonder was I hadn't been killed. High above, the splintered end showed where it had been twisted from the tree. I moved past the old fountain until I found myself once again before the corbie door. But the door was a dull, prosaic thing in the light of day. Even the mistletoe and the corbies carved upon it seemed unimaginatively crude. Nor did the passage reveal anything more.

Yet, curiously, an idle thought persisted in my mind. As a child I had accompanied my father on several occasions to an amusement park near Tilborn, and I recall how the tram car stopped just above a large culvert and the passengers all walked down a flight of steps to enter the park through the culvert archway. From the window of the car I could see the sea, the shore and the bright painted buildings. Then, after descending the stairs, I saw that same scene as I passed through the archway. But, childlike, I never would believe that it was the *same* scene. I was sure there were two seashores, and two amusement parks, one above and one below, and for me the upper one began to take on a kind of magical quality all its own.

Could I apply the same reasoning here? Could there be two manor grounds, one perhaps in a different plane, and did that corbie door stand as an entrance between them?

That evening Dennison Eldridge called again. He carried a small camera and several flash bulbs, and he asked to see the library "first", apparently assuming I had given my consent to his inspection of the entire house.

He took several pictures of the library, then moved across to the book shelves and ran his eye up and down the titles. But apparently he didn't find what he was looking for, for after a moment he turned to me.

"I happen to know your Uncle Charles never used this room," he said. "Avoided it like the plague. He threw out some of the books, too."

"They're not a very cheerful lot," I agreed.

Eldridge tamped tobacco in his pipe and lit it slowly. "Most of the books he cast out were destroyed," he said. "But a number of them found their way into the village, and I was lucky enough to get my hands on one of them for a short time. The rest of them are . . . unobtainable." He puffed in silence a moment, then crossed to a chair and slumped into it.

"Let me give you a little history of this house as I have pieced it together," he said. A glitter had entered his eyes now, and his hands trembled perceptibly. "It begins as far as I can determine in the year 1507 at the close of the reign of Henry VII. Edward Corbie had fought at Bosworth Field, supporting Richard III. Upon Richard's death, Corbie moved here to Langham and threw his will and fortune into the building of the manor to honor his marriage to Elizabeth Beaufort, who, ironically enough, was a direct descendent of John of Gaunt."

"According to the more or less muddled chronicles which have come down, Elizabeth pleaded with her husband not to build on

this site. There was something about the grove of oak trees that oppressed her. Corbie, however, laughed at her fears and went ahead with the construction, even sending to France for some of the stained glass windows.

"In 1507 a visitor to the manor, after dining alone with Corbie, asked to see his wife. The Master, who was quite drunk at the time, led his guest to a stone crypt in the park and opened a door carved with the likeness of two corbies. Inside the guest beheld a hideous sight."

"There was the woman, Elizabeth, propped up on a chair, her body enveloped in a heavy cloak, her face hidden by her long undone hair. But the wind from the open door blew the hair to one side to reveal the putrefaction of death, and the cloak dropped down from the left breast, showing a horrible wound where the heart had been literally torn from the body.

"From there on, the account becomes vague. One part has it that Edward Corbie was taken to Newgate Prison where he died shortly. Another declares 'that it was recognized his soul was taken over by devils,' and that he was 'left alone with his own knowledge of evil and self torment.' Anyway, it isn't a pleasant tale."

"No," I replied, "it isn't. But neither is it worse than the background of a great many houses I'm familiar with. Practically no historical landmark in England is complete without at least one or more ghosts of the past."

All the same I felt the cloud of foreboding thicken about me.

Eldridge shrugged. "I've told you only the beginning, the initial crime," he said. "The rest you can dig up for yourself, if you have better luck than I."

He took his leave a short time later. At the door, however, he hesitated.

"I spoke of a crypt with an oddly designed door," he said, "sup-

posedly in the grounds somewhere. The thing's probably long since been destroyed, but if it isn't, I should . . . well, I should avoid it if I were you."

The blow on the head had taken more of my strength than I realized, and I decided to retire early. Climbing up the grand staircase to our second floor bedroom, I counted the rungs of the balustrade as is my custom, but halfway to the top, lost count, and had to go down and start over again. Again I lay awake for hours, tossing restlessly. The corbie door persisted in my thoughts; it seemed to lure me with all the drawing power of a lodestone. What, I wondered, did Eldridge know about that door that he had seen fit to warn me away from it. And what was in those books my uncle had thrown out of his library?

I fell asleep at length but awoke at a quarter of two. The bed at my side was empty; Debora was gone! For several moments I lay there, listening. Then I got up, opened the door and went out into the corridor. A single orchid-shaded night light burned at the far end, partially illuminating the grand staircase. At the top of the stairs, leaning lightly against the top post of the balustrade, stood a woman, her back turned toward me. But as I looked, I saw that it was not Debora. She had copper-colored hair, the same as my wife's, and she was of the same height with the same general contours of figure. But it was not Debora! I knew this as a man knows a familiar object in the dark. In utter silence she stood there, as if waiting for something. Then, even as I took a step forward, she began to descend.

She had reached a point half way down when I gained the head of the stairs. And then a strange thing happened. The woman seemed to fade away into nothingness. One moment she was there; the next, she had disappeared utterly. Yet as I stood there, a great inward chill swept up my spine. For in the dust which still lay

thick on the steps I could see her footprints continue to descend, one after another!

Control left me then. I uttered a cry and ran down to the library. It was empty. I burst through the connecting doorway into the assembly chamber. Five feet away Debora, a lavender-colored robe over her nightdress, drew up short with a startled exclamation.

"Why, Robert," she said, "what's wrong?"

"What are you doing here?" I demanded.

She laughed. "You forgot to latch the garden door. It was banging in the wind, and I went down to fasten it, that's all."

"And you weren't on the staircase a moment ago?" I persisted. My pulse was still racing from what I had seen.

She laughed again. "Of course I was. I came directly down here. Come, Robert, go to bed. You're not awake yet."

Early next morning, immediately after breakfast, I slipped on an old sweater for the weather had turned suddenly cold, and set out for Langham. Without a plan but with a strong curiosity prompted by Eldridge's reference to "books still in the village," I headed down the old lane, facing a strong southwest wind. For the first time I had opportunity to examine the surrounding countryside, and I confess it impressed me anything but favorably. The road itself was a twisting strip of mire and jagged holes; bridges were rotting and sadly in need of repair; and the heath that stretched away on all sides waved its grasses in a way that resembled the slow undulations of a forlorn sea.

The few cottages and houses that were visible from the road were tumble-down affairs, many of them without paint, most of them with their hedging gone rank and untrimmed. One thing struck me as rather odd. None of them had windows opening to the north; that is in the direction of the manor. But then of

course the winds must be bitter sweeping across this open expanse during the cold months.

Arriving in the village, I chose the pub as a likely initial source of information. At that hour the place was deserted, save for the one man talking with the tavernkeeper. He was a red-faced man with a toothbrush mustache who eyed me suspiciously when I offered a few idle comments on the weather. But when, by way of introduction, I swung the conversation around to the manor, he suddenly placed his glass of ale down on the counter and faced me deliberately.

"You'll be the new master of Corbie House," he said.

I nodded. "Perhaps you can help me," I said. "I understand a number of books from the manor library have found their way into the village. Do you know who has them?"

The man shook his head violently. "I know nothing at all about Corbie House," he said. "Nothing at all." With hands that trembled, he fumbled for a coin, flung it on the bar and hurried out.

Unfriendly fellow, I thought. Evidently the manor, standing as the mark of ancient overlordship, was still the object of some resentment here. But an hour later I was more puzzled than I cared to admit.

Though I had spoken to a dozen villagers and though in most cases I had been politely received, the moment I mentioned the manor or the books which were the object of my search, conversation came to a sudden embarrassing halt. Now, as I passed down the street, I was aware of eyes turned furtively in my direction, of groups gathering in doorways to whisper audibly after I had gone. I was a stranger, of course, and the attitude may have been the usual one accorded newcomers who sought to pry into what were deemed private affairs. But somehow I could not accept that reasoning.

I came to the vicarage at length and found the vicar in, a

rather youngish man with a skull quite bald and kindly yet penetrating eyes. We smoked our pipes together with some of his strong shag-cut tobacco, chatting pleasantly. Abruptly I came to the point.

"What is wrong with Corbie House?" I asked.

He looked at me in silence. If my question startled him, his face didn't reveal it. "Wrong?" he repeated at length.

"Yes," I said, "wrong. I've been trying to locate several volumes which I understand contain a history, or partial history, of the manor and which I have reason to believe are somewhere in Langham. But I may as well have been asking for the moon for all the response I've got. Is the past of the manor so unpleasant then that . . . ?"

"Pleasantness is hardly a quality which enters into it," the vicar said. He seemed fighting two emotions, a simultaneous desire and reluctance to talk. His gray eyes winked nervously several times, and, laying down his pipe, he ran his left hand over his smooth pate.

"I have the books you mentioned," he said. "There are two of them and a part of a third. They came to me as part of the possessions of my predecessor, and they were placed in his hands by your Uncle Charles when he first took possession of the manor. I might say that a Mr. Dennison Eldridge who lives in the village has on several occasions requested permission to see them, but of course I refused."

"Why?" I demanded. In the cheerless house that this was, the cloud of foreboding was slowly returning to gather about me.

The vicar shifted in his chair uneasily. "Your Uncle Charles left certain implicit instructions concerning their removal," he said. "It seems that two of the books are identical. One of them is to be retained here in this house; the other is to be turned over to the new master of the manor upon his request. When

read, they are to be read at the same hour, separately. That is, as I understand it, we are to agree on a certain time, and I am then to read one copy here, and presumably you the other at Corbie House. Your Uncle Charles was very emphatic about this."

"But why?" I said again.

He shook his head. "I don't know. The books have been packed away in two boxes—they're in my garret—and I have never seen fit to disregard the instructions. I would suggest, however, that you deliberate the matter carefully before . . ."

"No," I interrupted stubbornly. "I want them now." All this vague talk about secret books was beginning to irritate me and at the same time arouse in me a mounting sense of unease.

The vicar left the room. I heard him mounting the stairs and a moment later the sounds of fumbling about overhead. He returned presently, carrying two small flat boxes made of wood and equipped with staples and padlocks. One of them, slightly larger, bore a penciled cross on its cover.

"This is the box that is to remain with me," the vicar said, and his voice sounded strained. "It apparently contains the uncompleted book as well as the duplicate in your box. I shall read this or not according to your wishes. Now for the time element. Shall we say two hours from now? That will give you ample time to return to the manor."

I agreed hastily, and I also told him he had my permission to read the uncompleted book. At the door the vicar seized my hand and shook it heavily.

"I don't suppose you would reconsider," he said. "I don't suppose you would, as the saying goes, let sleeping dogs lie?"

But I shook my head, and after thanking him, set off rapidly. The return to the manor seemed endless, but I found the vicar's time estimate to be accurate, for the clock was just striking as I entered the door. I found then that the vicar had forgotten to

give me a key, and I was forced to wait, fuming with impatience, while the manservant located an iron bar, stout enough to force the hæp.

Inside was a comparatively small book bound with covers of waxed oak wood, with iron hinges but without a title. It was a curious volume. Some of the pages were hand-printed, with the margins ornate with colored designs and what appeared to be cabalistic symbols. Other pages had been carefully written in a fine spidery hand; while the last section was blurred and almost undecipherable, as if it had been immersed in water.

Opening a page at random, my eyes fastened on a passage which I read several times:

. . . the crypt stode not far from the house on a little knoll and was surrounded by seven mightie oak trees. It was built of stone and opened by a strange and unusual door, bearing the likeness of corbies, framed by sprigs of mistletoe, and having in the center the design of a death's head.

For an hour I read, a powerful magnifying glass aiding me. At the end of that time I sat back with a low exclamation. The history of the Corbie family was a black one, and doom seemed to have stalked the female line down through the generations.

In 1548 Rupert Corbie was credited with having murdered his own daughter. Here again there was mention of the door of the crypt, "where the girl had been properly entombed, only to have her body disappear three days later."

Mary, wife of James Corbie, was found dead in bed when her husband returned from a hunting party with Charles I. Her skull was crushed, and the mark of a cloven hoof was said to be upon her brow.

Lenoire Corbie alone had outlived her husband, but her death in 1714 was surrounded by mysterious circumstances. Accused of being slightly mad, she was accustomed to walk at night in the

manor grounds. The crypt at that time had long since been destroyed; only the door remained, standing alone and forlorn in the midst of the oak trees. On the night of her death the villagers in Langham reported a strange light in the sky in the direction of the manor park, and one peasant ran breathless into the town to tell of a procession of cowed figures marching through the wood. Lenoire Corbie was found sprawled before the crypt door, hand outstretched, as if her last dying movement had been to thrust it open, though this action was incomprehensible, for as the writer said, "she could have simply walked around it."

The last section of the book seemed to have been written by another person, perhaps at an earlier date, and was in such bad condition that I could decipher none of it. All in all, it was a strange volume, but hardly one, I thought, that necessitated a simultaneous reading by two persons.

And then I turned to the last page. Printed here in curious stilted letters in a solution that looked more like blood than ink, was the inscription:

*Pass not the portals of the door with the corbies, or heaven
help ye, ye shall lose thy soul!*

The rest of the day was one of misery for me. For one thing, the wound on my head was not healing the way it should, and I regretted not visiting the local physician while I was in Langham. It felt feverish with the sensation of a pulse in it, and in a vague way it seemed to be effecting my vision. A wind-swept rain came up again in the late afternoon, confining me to the house, and the view of the lowering sky through the library windows was a depressing one. But most significant of all was the lure of the corbie door. Whether or not it was a psychological paradox, the result of the many warnings I had received or read, I did not know, but the door remained in my mind's eye

constantly. It drew me, it attracted me until I felt I would go mad if I could not pass through it again.

That night after Debora had retired I sat again in the library. I read for awhile but time dragged past. Then about midnight a low sobbing reached my ears. I went to the door and listened. The rain had passed on and the sky was clear, but water still murmured in the roof's runnels. The wind blew from the south-west, and it carried the sound with it. There was something unearthly about that sobbing; the owner of the voice seemed in deepest despair, and I felt a slow chill sweep over me.

In the grounds I headed straight for the corbie door, found it open as I had told myself it would be. I entered the black passage and completed the circle.

Again I found myself in a borderland world!

The night was a repetition of the night before. Once more I saw that silent procession of cowed figures and drawn by that strange lure, I followed them into the glade. A man and a woman in mid-seventeenth century dress were in the lead. Again all was vague and shadowy, but the woman was the same tall, full-bosomed woman with copper-colored hair and hazel eyes so strangely like Debora.

The fantastic dance, the horrible rites followed like a cinema film which has been run a second time. The man drew forth a knife, and hideous and nauseating, the beast that was not a beast took form on the slab. Through the dimness I watched it rear its evil head, waiting for that moment when the knife would strike. The woman screamed and fell.

And then a sea of darkness washed over me, blotting out the scene. There was a sensation of reeling earth and a great roaring, and then somehow I was stumbling out of the black woods toward the manor.

At ten o'clock next morning Dennison Eldridge was ushered by the woman servant into the library. He was hatless, and his face was drawn and haggard. He threw a question at me before I had a chance to speak.

"Did you see the vicar yesterday," he demanded.

"Why, yes," I replied, "I did. But . . ."

"And did you make arrangements with him to open those books that once belonged to your Uncle Charles? The books, two copies of which were supposed to be read at the same time?"

"I don't quite see what business it is . . ."

"Did you?" he persisted.

I nodded, staring at him in perplexity.

Eldridge lowered himself into a chair with a low moan. "God forgive me," he said. "I should have warned you."

I was conscious of a growing uneasiness as I waited for him to explain.

"The vicar," Eldridge said at length, "was found unconscious on the floor of his study. In his fireplace were the charred remnants of printed pages. Oh, he wasn't harmed physically," he went on. "He couldn't be, you know. But his mind . . ." Eldridge spread his hands, and his eyelids drooped wearily, "his mind is completely gone."

"But why . . .?" I said.

"The Langham doctor said he might recover in a long time. He also said the vicar was suffering from a severe mental shock. Probably that's nearer the truth than he imagined. We shall never know what was in that second book. . . . But you, sir, couldn't you close up this place and move back to London? Couldn't you?"

Six days passed. They were days of horror, of bewilderment, of fear for my sanity. Thus far, thank heaven, I had been able to keep the truth from Debora, though I was sure she was be-

ginning to suspect something was wrong. But my life in the manor had centered down to anticipation during the daylight hours—anticipation for the unknown—and mental struggle each night to fight off the lure of the corbie door.

Six times I had entered the passage opened by that door, traversed the sixty steps, and found myself in a borderland world. The first and second night I took this action to investigate a woman's cry I thought I had heard. But after that I was drawn by a psychic power. It was as if a lorelei lurked beyond that door, calling out to me in a command that would not be denied.

Six times I have followed a man and a woman with copper-colored hair strangely resembling Debora into the glade in the wood. The vision was always the same. First the writhing dance of the cowed figures, then the incantation, then the materialization of the beast-Thing on the stone slab, and finally, hideous and terrifying, the sacrifice.

The horror lay in the fact that I knew in advance each detail that was going to happen and that I was powerless to prevent it.

In the light of these developments, I phoned the mason in Langham, asking him to come to the manor immediately. If I could not resist the lure of the corbie door by strength of will alone, I meant to seal its entrance forever. But the man was vague in his replies, promising only that he would "do what he could."

The day of the twenty-eighth of June was a day of somber skies and humid heat. At six o'clock Debora and I ate our evening meal, and I called her attention again to the button on my waistcoat which once more had turned blue in color.

"I see nothing wrong with it, Robert," she said with her maddening insistence. Then she added in a dry, "Are you feeling quite well?"

At seven o'clock I began to feel the attraction of the corbie

door, and I phoned the Langham mason again. But although I let the instrument ring repeatedly, there was no answer. By eight the strange lure was upon me like a mental cloud. I climbed the grand staircase and entered a room on the south side of the third floor. This room I had discovered was fitted with three large windows in the form of an alcove. By looking diagonally out of the middle window I found I could obtain a clear and unobstructed view of the corbie door. I remained there an hour, staring down at the vague rectangular shape of the door.

Shortly after eleven Debora laid aside her needlework and went to her room. Ten minutes later found me in the library pacing back and forth restlessly before the book-lined walls. A hush had settled over the manor.

Midnight came and passed. I slumped into a chair and began to reason with myself. Tomorrow the masons would surely be here, and the door and the passage would be walled up forever. Could I go on after that, always wondering whether I actually had seen those visions or whether they were some quirk of my imagination? Did I dare trust my sanity in future months, always with the knowledge that I had been on the brink of the unknown?

For an hour I sat there, my palms moist with cold perspiration. Then at one o'clock I got up and strode deliberately into the grounds. Once more, I told myself feverishly; just once more . . .

I am back. I have returned to the library from my last and final vision. But vision it is no longer. This time, God help me, I have taken an active part in the tragedy. This time . . .

It is four in the morning. Even now the details of all that happened are a blur in my memory. Were it not for this blood on my hands and this knife on the table, I would swear it was all a dream.

I entered the passage, and I followed the sixty steps to the door again. There in the moonlight I looked upon the statues

that were all restored and the fountain that was a cromlech. There I saw the procession of cowed figures and the woman with the copper-colored hair in the lead.

I followed, but presently I became aware that it was I who strode at the woman's side, that it was I who grasped her wrist and drew her firmly down the aisle of columns.

In my hands I felt the haft of a long-bladed knife, and as we paced through the dark wood into the glade, I looked upon the woman without emotion. I felt only the overpowering desire to see the sacrifice completed.

Detail for detail the events in the glade were repeated with myself in the role of inquisitor. Then at last the moment came, and I drove the knife deep into her throat.

I had an instant's glance at my blood-smeared hands. Then I turned and ran. I remember running down the aisle of the columns, across the lawn and the flagstones and bursting through the library door. . . .

An hour has passed, and I am still slumped in the chair in that room. A great lassitude and weakness has swept over me. Inside the house I can hear the pendulum clock ticking slowly. Outside, a rising wind is howling around the gables and eaves . . .

. . . the wind has just ripped one of the French windows from its hinges and broken it into fragments. The sound of the crash will bring Debora to this room in a moment.

But the manor is utterly still. There is no sound from Debora's room . . . and that is odd . . .

The July first issue of the *London Chronicle* carried the following small item:

Reports of a duel tragedy have reached us today from Corbie House near Langham-on-Trell. The body of Mr. Robert Fielding was found by servants in the library of the house, following their

awakening by the sound of a shot in the early morning hours. Mr. Fielding, who only recently inherited the estate, lay, still clutching the revolver with which he had taken his life.

In the bedroom on the second floor the body of Mr. Fielding's wife, Debora, was also found. Her throat had been slashed with a large knife.

Yard officials as yet have been unable to supply a motive for the crime or to explain the trail of blood leading from the house to a glade in a nearby wood where the woman was undoubtedly killed.

Tepondicon

By seven o'clock, I could distinctly see the first plague city of Profaldo. In the grey light it lay there before me, a vague opalescent aura radiating from its spires and minarets. The three roads that crossed the flat converged on the city to meet at a single narrow runway.

I drove the tracto-car down into a little gully, climbed out and took a second look. The flat was deserted, as it well should be at this hour, and the only sign of life was a high-flying *tok*, circling slowly.

It took me only five minutes to make preparations for my entrance into Profaldo. The carefully wound coil of wire slipped down neatly under my tunic. Suspended from my left shoulder was a haversack, innocent appearing, but containing one of the seven transmitting sets, also a complete set of tools. I removed three of the white pellets from the little glass vial in my pocket and swallowed them.

Then I set out across the flat. Distance was deceptive, but I had calculated fairly closely, and an hour later saw me pacing up the runway to the entrance of Profaldo.

The guard in the cubicle stared when I stood before him. "You're not a citizen here," he said. "Do you know what place *this* is?"

"I know very well," I said. "Here are my papers, signed by the Council. Let me pass, please."

The gate slid back, and an instant later I was inside the city.

Profaldo! Plague-ridden, feared, legendary! Like its six sister cities, the place was known as a pest-hole, tenanted by doomed citizenry whose very futility of life made a mockery of everything decent and law-abiding.

Twenty yards down the street, and I saw indeed that the city was one vast slum. A drooling fog that dimmed the intermittent blue street lights gave a grotesque unreality to the thoroughfare.

Here and there were groups of the inhabitants. Only a few showed visible signs of the plague,—the greenish hue to the face and eyes, the disjointed, shambling walk—but I knew that all of them had the disease in one or more of its stages.

Following the directions I had memorized so carefully, I went straight down the street, turned left, then right. Yes, there it was. A slate-gray building, well out of plumb, with a dingy sign before the doorway: POWER DIVISION.

I went in. There were no ushers, no reception clerks, only a faint drone of machinery somewhere below me. A long corridor angled in either direction with marked doors every few feet. The sixth door bore the marking: COMMISSIONER.

Even as I looked upon the room's occupant, I knew that this, my initial step would be a success. The man glared at me. "Complaint department down the hall," he said. "This is a private office."

I crossed to the chair beside his desk and sat down. "I'm George Dulfay," I said quietly, "the new inspector sent by the Council. Will you sign my papers, please?"

He scowled again and peered at me shrewdly but, after a careless glance at the document I had handed him, he seized a stylus and affixed his signature. Then he raised his eyes to mine.

"New man, eh?" he grinned. "And what do you think of our fair city?"

He leaned back and made steeples of his hands. "Everything's the same," he said. "Four hundred deaths, four hundred births. One attempted escape resulting in execution. Flood-water"—he glanced across at the far wall where a panel bore a series of dials—"water 65.0, oxygen zero-zero, paldine 5."

"And the research bureau?" I questioned. So far, I knew I was playing my part to satisfaction.

He snorted. "Failures as usual. You and the Council know as well as I do that there's no cure for the plague."

It was time for the first step, but I didn't hurry it. I got a cheroot out of my pocket, lit it and blew a shaft of smoke toward the mildewed ceiling.

"I'll okay the report as usual," I said. "But there's one thing more. I'll want to buy some of your power. About sixteen thousand *graphlos* . . ."

A wire couldn't have jerked him erect any quicker. "Power!" he repeated. "Sixteen thousand . . ." A gleam entered his blood-shot eyes. "By the Lord Harry! And for what, may I ask?"

I could feel my pulse racing and a hot flush sweep over me, but outwardly I knew I appeared cool.

"If your Research Bureau here believes there is no cure for the plague, the Council has different ideas," I said. "We're going to try an experiment. Sixteen thousand *graphlos* of polarated power at each of the seven cities discharged along a common beam with a step-up transformer between each city. Gargan—he's the new light-ray man in the Council—believes the radiation from such a charge will completely nullify the potency of the plague bacillus."

The Commissioner moved to the edge of his chair. "By the Lord Harry," he said, "you're no inspector. Who are you?"

"You have my papers."

He picked them up again and re-read them carefully. I watched him. I could feel something cold move up and down my spine. And then with a wave of relief I saw the first signs of credulity.

"I believe you mean it," he said. "Tell me, do you really think there's a chance, an escape from this plague?"

"There's a possibility, but of course it's remote and only in the embryonic stage. Of course you understand all this is confidential. Now—where is your power switchboard?"

He touched a bell, said something into a microphone. Then he got up and extended his hand. "Follow the corridor, Mr. Dulfay. And may Providence go with you."

Outside the office, reaction seized me, and for a moment I swayed there, aware of the strain I had been under. The first barrier was passed. From now on, although there still would be danger, my actions for the most part would be routine. I threw away my cheroot and headed down the corridor.

That corridor ended in a flight of stairs which I climbed to the second level. Through an archway I passed into the power room proper. Tilted back in a chair in front of the enormous switchboard, a weazened little man nodded to me, signifying that he had had his instructions. I went to work without hesitation, threw over the auxiliary switch, removed the coil of wire from under my tunic and spliced it directly into the main conduit.

Finished, I trailed the coil of wire across the room and tossed it out the open window into the darkness of an alley. I went outside to gather up the loose ends. A low shed there, housing emergency transformers, served my purpose admirably. I got the compact little transmitting set out of my haversack, bracketed it to the wall in a far corner and set the clockwork to functioning.

Exactly one hour later I was back in my tracto-car, driving across the flat.

If a month ago anyone had told me I would visit not only Pro-

faldo but each of the seven plague cities of the High Ganymedian Plateau, I would have told them they were crazy. That was before I met Hol-Dai.

Hol-Dai was not his real name, of course; that was what they called him at the mental hospital where I was serving my internship. A patriarch of a man, one of the early Earth colonists, he had broken down from excessive research in extra-terrestrial medicine, and he was forever browsing through heavy medical tomes. One day he began talking to me as usual and for want of something better to do, I listened.

"My son," he said, "you've heard of the seven plague cities: Profaldo, Senar, Caldray, Voltar, Xyman, Malakan, and Klovada?"

I nodded. "Yes, Hol-Dai. Here, take your medicine."

He swallowed the two pills and pointed to a sheet of paper upon which he had been writing. "Did you know they were the richest cities in the System?"

"Rich? No, Hol-Dai, you must be wrong. They have nothing but pestilence."

He smiled at that and wagged a finger. "The plague is their protection, my son. Conquer that, and you will come upon the greatest treasure known to mankind. Listen . . ."

Well, I heard him out, patiently at first, then gradually with more and more interest. It was a madman's story in every detail, and yet there was something about it that got me. I knew how the seven cities of the High Ganymedian Plateau were first raided by Conway and his Earth Brigade after enjoying several thousand years' culture on this, the third satellite of Jupiter. How the captured emperor of the seven cities swore vengeance for the mishandling of his people and in some unknown way introduced the strange and terrible plague which was to turn the seven metropoli into pest-holes avoided and shunned by Earth and Jovian colonists alike.

Then Hol-Dai said something which made me prick up my ears. "Why," he said, "do you think the emperor introduced that plague? For vengeance alone? A ruler's vengeance does not go as far as dooming his people forever. No, my son, for another reason."

I said nothing, waiting for him to continue.

"For three thousand years the seven cities had been living off the plunder of conquered Io and Callisto, the first and second satellites. And never has it occurred to these fools what has become of that plunder."

"They probably will, Hol-Dai," I said. "Some day a fleet of space freighters will carry it all off."

The white-haired old man shook his head. "Not a fleet, my son. A man in the palm of his hand."

I sat down then, and I asked questions, and after a time I had the story in its entirety. Both Io and Callisto had been conquered by the people of Ganymede and had been forced to pay a huge indemnity. Part of that indemnity came in the form of a stone, called by the Ganymedians, the Jupiter Stone. That stone contained a compressed particle of the light-active rock which formed Jupiter's great red spot. *And this stone contained sufficient inexhaustible power to move the industrial plants of half the system.*

I forgot for a moment that Hol-Dai was listed as psychopathically unbalanced. "Where is this stone?" I demanded.

"It lies in a simple glass case in the old emperor's palace in the city of Klovakla," he replied. "But"—he lifted a warning hand—"do not think it is as simple as that. The people of the High Ganymedian Plateau were aware of the value of their treasure and they adopted means to protect it.

"They protected the stone by surrounding it with a small space warp. As it lies there now, it is so heavy an army could not lift it."

"Then . . . ?"

"How can it be removed? There is a way, my son. The space warp has been devised to have seven focal points, lying along the plane of the seven cities. I have devised transmitting equipment which will discharge a beam along this plane, nullifying the space warp. But, to accomplish this, entrance must be made into each of the seven cities, and that would mean contracting the terrible plague in not one but all seven of its virulent forms.

"I have taken care of that too. I have compounded a pellet which will give temporary immunity to the plague if taken at the proper intervals and . . ."

Here Hol-Dai's mind gave way again, and he lapsed into unintelligible babbling.

I mulled over this story for a week. During that time I read over Hol-Dai's case history and discovered that his lucid intervals were fairly intermittent and complete. Next I visited the place where he had lived before he was confined to the hospital. My credentials gained my entrance and the right to go through his possessions. Nothing had been touched. I found his vial of immunity pellets and I found in his equipment the seven miniature transmitting sets. In his papers, however, I searched in vain for reference to the Jupiter Stone.

But I didn't stop there. I haunted the archives galleries, seeking proof for everything Hol-Dai had told me. Where I didn't find proof, I found "possibility." The old man's story could be true.

As I read over the history of Ganymede, the lure, the fascination of that "stone" swept over me. It became a narcotic, off-

setting all other desires until I knew I must act. I took Hol-Dai's equipment and his vial of pellets, and I spent one week studying the layouts of the seven cities. I drove in a tracto-car to the first city of Profaldo, and as you have seen, I successfully "planted" the first transmitting set.

"One down, six to go," I told myself grimly. Full confidence was mine, and my spirits were riding high.

Senar, the second city, came out of the haze. High in the sky the immense disc of Jupiter cast a reddish light over the metropolises. As before, all roads leading across the flat converged on a single runway, leading to the main gate.

I entered, and it seemed time had turned backward, erasing the intervening hours. For Senar was the same as Profaldo.

Again I came to the building marked POWER DIVISION. In the Commissioner's office, however, I was due for a surprise. A girl turned to me inquiringly.

She was tall, and dark-haired. "Well?" she said.

The same story, the same explanation. I proffered my papers, waited a diplomatic length of time, then stated that I wished to purchase some power.

To my astonishment, however, she took the offer matter-of-factly.

"I know," she said. "You are Tepondicon."

"I'm *what?*"

She smiled. "At least you are the mortal counterpart of that legendary figure. According to the Ganymedian legends, a great disaster was to come upon our seven cities and would not be removed until a brave warrior entered each of the cities and fought it alone. The legends call that warrior Tepondicon."

"I see," I said. "And you think . . .?"

"We have the disaster in the form of the plague. Now you

are here in an attempt to conquer that plague." She waved a careless hand at my consternation. "The Commissioner at Profaldo advised me of your coming. We still do have some communication left, you know."

Tepondicon! It made my role easier. It fitted into my plans nicely. Before I could say more, she was conducting me down the corridor to the power room. She stood by, watching over me, as for a second time I made my necessary connections to the central conduit, and she followed me as I mounted my second transmitting set on a low revetment in the rear of the power building.

As I touched the clockwork into motion she grasped my arm.

"There is no need for you to leave immediately, Mr. Dulfay," she said. "I know very well that you have temporary protection against the plague. Won't you let me show you more of the city of Senar?"

My better judgment said no; my eyes said yes.

An hour later I found myself in a dimly lighted cafe, among men and women, all in various stages of intoxication—all, I knew, seeking to conceal their terror at the relentless death that stalked them.

I sat across a table from the Commissioner of Senar.

"Come," she said, "forget your troubles. Remember, you are Tepondicon."

But something was wrong. I could feel it with every fibre of my body. That man looking at me from the opposite table, for one thing. He had been too casual in his quick appraisal of me, too quick to lower his eyes when I glanced his way.

And then abruptly it hit me hard. I was Tepondicon, and as such, my avowed attempt to cure the plague made me a valuable entity, if controlled by the right persons.

I looked around carefully, and I saw other men at other tables, covertly watching me. I began to feign drunkenness. Then clumsily I staggered to my feet.

Stumbling unsteadily, I weaved my way toward the exit. Half-way I broke into a run. Instantly a shout of warning rose up behind me.

I gained the door. Feet pounded in pursuit. Then I was outside, leaping up the steps to the main level, sprinting down the back street.

I ran until a stitch in my side drew me up. Behind me roared the night life of the city, but there was no sign of pursuit. I passed through the main gate without trouble and half an hour later was driving leisurely across the flat.

Profaldo and Senar were behind me. What conditions would I meet in the next city, Caldray? My wildest dreams did not prepare me for the reception that was to be mine. Scarcely had I entered Caldray when I stopped short, staring at the scene ahead. The streets were jammed with citizenry. In blazing ato-bulbs high overhead was the single word TEPONDICON. Flags and pennants hung from every balcony.

Even as I moved uncertainly forward, two stalwart men, clad in the ancient chain mail strode forward. Back somewhere in the tiers of rectangular buildings the amplified strains of an orchestra rose up. It was a recording, I knew, but it was Bokart's *Symphony Out of Space*, in all its pomp and glory.

A deafening cheer rose up then. I was conducted to a low carriage, and with two scarlet-dad postilions on either side began my tour of the city.

"Tepondicon! Tepondicon!" yelled the crowd.

It was confusing, and disconcerting. With all eyes focused upon me, my every movement would be watched. A wrong word, a misstep, and those cheers would change to death yells. And

yet as the carriage bore me smoothly along the paved streets, the significance of it all became clear in my mind in every detail.

These people were doomed by the plague. And in four days more the Jupiter Stone would be mine. Up until now, my life had been one great series of failures. This would be my metamorphosis, my emergence from the cocoon of mediocrity into success.

The procession drew up before the Power Division building. The Power Commissioner, a tall gangly man, waited to receive me at the top of the steps.

But inside his office, with the hubbub of the streets cut off, the interview was much the same as the two previous. He passed a box of cheroots across the desk, leaned back and smoked contentedly.

"And to think," he said, "that a week ago I was ready to join the list of suicides. Mr. Dulfay, I wonder if you realize what this means to the people. Freedom from the plague. It seems incredible."

"You must remember," I cautioned, "It's only an experiment as yet. I can promise nothing."

He waved this aside. "You will be successful," he said. "The hopes of thousands cannot be denied. And now the power. All we have is at your disposal."

Voltar! Xynan! Malakan! In the fourth, fifth and sixth cities everything worked like clockwork. My welcome in each succeeding metropolis was greater than the last. Crowds screamed "*Tepondicon!*" to the echo. The cities must have ransacked every corner of their confines to festoon their battlements and parapets with tinsel. Hope was hysteria. The black spectre of the plague was pushed to the background. As the legendary hero, Tepondicon, I was the embodiment of all their dreams and hopes.

Before entering each city I swallowed three of Hol-Dai's pel-

lets. Before leaving, I tapped the power centers and put transmitting sets in operation.

And now Klovada, the seventh and final city. In a few hours my beam would be discharged along the planes of the seven cities. The space warp would be nullified. Remained then only to go to the royal palace, open the glass case and remove the Jupiter Stone. With that stone my life would begin anew.

I did not realize the strain under which I had been living until the official reception in Klovada was over and I was ushered into the Commissioner's office. There I slumped wearily into a chair and waited impatiently for him to enter.

The Commissioner was a girl, a small dainty child with golden hair and blue eyes. She strode forward briskly, a pleasant smile on her lips, and extended her hand.

"I bid you welcome, Sir Tepondicot," she said. "You have reached the end of your goal."

There was something in her tone that made me look at her sharply.

"You have come a long way," she said, speaking slowly. "You have braved many dangers, and you have conducted yourself in a most ethical manner. May I ask, Mr. Dulfay, what your personal profit will be in this venture?"

"No profit," I said easily. "A scientist has only research as his aim. That and the welfare of the people."

She nodded. "Still, it is unusual for a man to risk so much."

"About the matter of power," I broke in. "As you know, I'll need sixteen thousand *graphlos* and . . ."

She seemed not to hear. A distant look entered her eyes. "tell me, Mr. Dulfay, have you ever heard of an artifact kept here in Klovada known as the Jupiter Stone?"

I went slowly rigid. The girl breathed deeply and continued. "Some time ago a great scientist communicated with me as over-

chief of power-control of the seven cities and outlined a plan similar to the one in which you are now engaged. He was a great man, but under stress of excessive work, his mind broke. He was taken to a mental hospital, where I am told he is now known by the simple name of Hol-Dai."

"Before his illness Hol-Dai worked out a method to overcome the plague. It was simple. A person would visit each of the seven cities. He would have temporary protection against the plague, but of course he would become a carrier for the germs. When he finally reached Klovada, the final city, he would be a walking vial of the bacillus in all its seven forms.

"Now the Jupiter Stone, of which I spoke before. It is a great thing, capable of generating untold amounts of power, if properly harnessed. So far, however, the scientists have been unable to move it because it lies protected by a small but peculiar form of space warp. But the stone has other potentialities. This man, Hol-Dai, discovered that it will transform the plague bacillus from a positive form to a negative form.

"In other words if this hypothetical visitor of the seven cities were, at the end of his journey, to expose himself to the radiations of the Jupiter Stone, a curious event would take place. He would become a carrier for bacilli which, when released, would immediately begin to combat the plague. Practically an anti-toxin, you see. Again, continuing our hypothetical case, if this man were to retrace his steps, again visiting each one of the seven cities, it is estimated this action would result in the complete end of the plague within a period of months."

"I see," I said. Far back in a corner of my mind a doubt was beginning to grow. "Why hasn't this been done before?"

She smiled. "Because until you came no one knew how to acquire temporary protection against the disease and no one had the courage to expose himself to it without that protection. Now

I am aware that you have found that protection. But as you must know, if you let yourself be struck by the radiations of the Jupiter Stone, you would die within six weeks!"

"You mean . . .?"

"I mean that if you go through with your role as Tepondicon you will never live to know your glory."

She tapped her pencil on the desk. "I might add that Hol-Dai also told us of a plan to nullify the space warp surrounding the Jupiter Stone. Since his sickness, however, that plan has remained a mystery."

I breathed easier. So Hol-Dai had not tricked me. But this girl with all her babbling of curing the plague must be an utter fool. What did I care about cure? It was the stone I wanted!

She looked across at me. "I don't know who or what you are, Mr. Dulfay, but please listen to me a moment. Once these seven cities were the pride of the Jovian System. Their people were lighthearted, gay and strong. True, in their earlier years they exploited their neighbors on Io and Callisto, but that was long ago. For generations they were engaged in peaceful pursuits—trade, industry, commerce.

"Look at them now. Pest holes where vice and sin run rampant, where hope has vanished, where there is no tomorrow, but only today! Conceive, if you can, the utter curse of that plague. To know with absolute finality that you are impregnated with it and that only death awaits you. And then consider this legend of Tepondicon. Not a mighty warrior, not a knight clad in armor, but a simple man sacrificing his own life for the lives of other men. It is the ultimate glory."

She rose to her feet. "Mr. Dulfay, I leave you now. But I call your attention to the two doors leading from this office. The one by which you came is the exit. It leads to the street, and from the street one can make his way to the palace and so on to the

Jupiter Stone. The stone is unguarded. If the space warp were done away with, it could be taken easily.

"The other door leads to the radiation chamber, the room which was devised by Hol-Dai. There, by means of special equipment, the radiations from the Jupiter Stone are transmitted to a screen. If you enter this room and sit before the screen, within a period of twenty minutes the plague germs your body is now carrying will be negated. You can then make your return visits to the six other cities. The plague will be conquered, but you will die."

She moved across to the exit. "It is for you to decide," she said. "All I can say is that one way leads to the ultimate glory."

She went out and I stood there in a daze. For five minutes I didn't move. Glory, she had said. Yes, there would be glory, something which had played no part heretofore in my life. But likewise there would be death. The same death which awaited the doomed citizenry of the seven doomed cities. On the other hand was the Jupiter Stone, embodying all I had fought for.

I walked across to the desk and sat down in the chair beside it. I must put my thoughts and actions of the past days on paper. I must record everything. If I chose the plague door, set up my transmitting set—and finally gained the Jupiter Stone, it would be a condemnation—a curse—to dog me the rest of my days. Honor versus dishonor, balanced against life versus death.

It is this document you are now reading!

At the end of an hour I stood up and neatly folded the paper. The air was hot, stifling. Somewhere a mercury clock pulsed rhythmically. Then, with a little laugh, I strode across the room toward one of the doors.

Of course, you all know which door I opened.

Incident at the Galloping Horse

There is a curiously unreal quality to Caribbean moonlight. Standing that night on the little deck of the *Mariegalante*, I could see the waves creaming on Tortola's beach, the bearded cabbage palms, and the road stretching white and lonely across the island—the road that had been old when Morgan sailed these seas.

From below, up the open companionway, drifted voices and the strains of Mendelssohn's *Ruy Blas*, one of Dolph Prescott's favorite selections. It was a paradox of the man's character that was hard to understand. The wealthy yacht-owner was indeed a strange mixture of artistic niceties and gross habits and opinions.

Presently Prescott appeared, climbing to the deck: a large, heavy man in white waistcoat with coarse colorless hair and a bristly mustache. He was followed by his wife, Claire, slender, violet-eyed, clad in an emerald evening dress.

"Hullo, Frank," he said. "You here all by yourself? Claire's got some errant idea of going ashore. See if you can change her mind."

I lit my pipe. "It might be better to wait until morning."

"Nonsense!" Claire Prescott laughed. "There's nothing on this side of the island but the ruins of that tavern, and I want to see it. Family pride, y'know."

All day she had talked of that old tavern. Dating to the seventeenth century, built of stone, it had stood here on Tortola's

eastern shore, deserted and forgotten, simply another crumbling relic of the Indies. It bore the curious name, *The Inn of the Galloping Horse*, and since Tortola was one of the British Virgins, off the beaten tourist track, it had gone virtually unmentioned in histories and travel volumes. Yet legend had it that Brasiliano, Bartolomew Portugee, L'Ollinois, Morgan, and other nefarious buccaneers had all dined and drunk in its common room and slept in its beds. Somewhere Claire Prescott had come upon an old diary, and through it claimed she was able to trace her ancestry back to one of the early tavernkeepers.

"Have the gig lowered, Dolph," Claire said stubbornly. "I'll go down and change and see if Mark wants to go."

We were four and a crew aboard the *Mariegalante*. Besides the Prescotts and myself, there was young Mark Lockridge who was writing and gathering atmosphere for a new novel, two predecessors of which had been quite successful.

Leaving Santiago, we had come leisurely down the "bow of Ulysses," with stops at Kingston, Port au Prince, and Ciudad Trujillo; then through the Mona Passage to San Juan. But it was the out-of-the-way ports of the Lesser Antilles in which Prescott was interested, and so the *Mariegalante* had swung north by east for a brief stay at Spanish Town in Virgin Gorda. Then at Claire's insistence and in spite of the vague warnings of the Spanish Town Negro harbor master, we had headed across the Drake Channel to our present anchorage at Tortola.

"Ef'n you go to Tortola," the Negro said, "be sure to sail south and land at Roadtown. Keep away from the eastern side and that old tavern there."

"But it is the tavern we want to see," Claire Prescott had protested.

The aged black had shaken his wooly head. "Nothing left of that old tavern but some piles of stone," he said earnestly. "Chris-

topber Marlet went over there a year ago, just being curious. Christopher don't talk much, but he ain't been right since." And he tapped his head knowingly.

As I stood there on the moonlit deck, watching the sailors work at the falls, preparatory to lowering the gig, the island looked peaceful like a picture post-card viewed through dark colored glasses. Towering up in the background was the black bulk of Mount Sage. The road leading gently up the slope looked somewhat forbidding. It was easy to picture a party of roistering buccaneers staggering down it, singing a ribald song.

At close range the beach wasn't as attractive as it had appeared from the yacht. There were treacherous coral reefs over which the water ripped and snarled and dashed back at us in a fan of spray. Presently, however, the gig grated to a landing, and the four of us, Dolph and Claire Prescott—in slacks now—Lockridge and myself, were pushing our way through the undergrowth to the cliff.

The cliff was steep at one point; farther on it dwindled to a low rise. A hundred yards beyond we came upon the road. The road simply began out of nowhere and swept smooth and even in a gentle curve, apparently bisecting the island. At first glance there was no sign of habitation of any kind; then after we walked a short distance, the low ruins of a building loomed ahead in the shadow of the palm-trees.

"It's the tavern," Claire said excitedly. "Think of it, Mark. More than two hundred and fifty years. What stories this place could tell." And she linked her arm in young Lockridge's in a manner that brought a frown to Dolph Prescott's lips. Ever since the *Mariegalante* had cleared Jamaica, the infatuation on the part of Claire for the novelist had grown openly. It was clear that jealousy was beginning to eat into Prescott.

We came abreast of the tavern. Two walls and a part of a

third were standing, the one facing the road having the rectangular opening of a doorway and an eyelike window embrasure on each side, the whole unpleasantly suggesting the face of some monstrous animal crouching there silently before us. All about were piles of crumbled masonry interspersed with clumps of yellow grass.

The tower, some twenty yards to the rear, seemed in a better state of preservation. Leaving the others to search for possible relics, I crossed the intervening space and looked for an opening in the weathered walls. There was none in evidence, but a series of steps cut deep into the stonework led in a circular fashion up to the top. I saw now what was obvious: that the tower, commanding a clear view of the Drake Channel, had served as a watchpost for passing buccaneers.

I swung up to the lower step and began to climb carefully, pressing close to the lower wall. Ten minutes later, after considerable exertion, I emerged on the top platform and saw that a man-high parapet encircled it. There were, however, a number of niches in the wall, all of them slightly rounded, apparently rests for a telescope. I strode to the seaward side and peered through one of them. The side walls of the slot were beveled and made to slant first in, then out, from a common center. A lining of an odd kind of stone had been mortised around it, a kind of porphyry that caught the moonlight and glittered dully. As I looked, it seemed that the view was magnified several times. Below me stretched the shimmering Caribbean, and there at anchor rode the dainty *Mariegalante*.

I crossed to the opposite side of the tower. Again I was struck by a strange, unreal clarity. I could see far down the deserted white road. Under the indigo glory of the heavens every tree, rock and shrub stood out with stereoscopic clarity.

For some moments I stood there at gaze. Then I saw it! Almost

at the limit of my vision, racing toward me down the sweep of the road, came a powerful white horse and rider. It approached at a full gallop, and the girl clinging to the animal's saddleless back—for it was a girl—pulled frantically at a single rein, apparently without the slightest effect. Her undone hair streamed behind her in the wind; her gray riding cloak whipped and billowed wildly.

Now they were almost beneath me, and while a strange haze seemed to blur my vision, I could see the fear that contorted the girl's face. Her lips were clamped shut, and blood welled at the corners where her teeth had cut into them. The nostrils of the horse were dilated, its eyes glazed. It seemed to be expending every effort to increase the distance between itself and some unseen horror behind.

They passed out of sight beyond the tower. I leaped across to the niche on the opposite wall, in time to see the horse leave the road and dash toward higher ground to the left. Up, up the frantic beast climbed, skirting rocks and thickets like some guided juggernaut. It reached the brink of the cliff, seemed to poise there motionless for a single heartbeat. Then to my horror it leaped and plunged down into the sea.

The spell was broken then, and I rushed to the tower stairs, but I still had sufficient presence of mind to descend with caution, the way down being infinitely more difficult and treacherous than the ascent. But when I reached the ruins of the tower I drew up in amazement. There, Claire Prescott was laughing idly while Lockridge related some absurd episode of the day. Five feet away Dolph poked unconcernedly amid the rubble with a short stick. All three turned sharply as they heard my exclamation.

"That girl . . .!" I cried. "Didn't you see her?"

Claire stared, then broke into a smile. "Don't tell me there's a princess imprisoned in the tower."

"But you must have seen her. The horse went straight down the road."

"Now it's a horse," grinned Lockridge. "I told you this place was haunted."

I fought back my anger and explained what I had seen. Or thought I had seen. Now I wasn't so sure. And my uncertainty was made even more patent as the three of them sought to discredit my story.

"You say you heard no hoofbeats?" Lockridge smiled urbanely.

"I said I wasn't aware of any. But I saw that horse and rider—a girl—gallop down the road and plunge over the cliff. Good Lord, man, I'd scarcely imagine a thing like that. Not at my age."

Lockridge could be unpleasant when he chose. "There's always self-hypnosis . . . auto-suggestion, Doctor Kennedy," he said. "And you did have a number of cocktails before coming out here."

I let it go at that. Perplexed, I walked slowly back down the road, studying its surface carefully. There was no sign of hoof marks. Nor did the soft loam of the cliff betray any sign of the animal's passage. And when I reached the summit and looked down into the dark water, I saw no floating object of any kind.

Back on the *Mariegalante*, I went to my cabin and brooded a half hour or so over a tasteless pipe. Auto-suggestion, Lockridge had said. And yet I had heard nothing beyond the tavern's name and the vague warnings of the Spanish Town harbormaster which would induce such a state of mind.

Dolph Prescott had in his cabin several good books on the Indies, and it occurred to me that one of them I had overlooked might possibly contain some mention of the tavern and that strange tower. I put on a dressing robe, entered the passageway and drew up short. At the far end of the corridor where but a single night light burned now, Claire Prescott was in Mark Lock-

ridge's arms. Embarrassed, I withdrew into my room, waited a moment, then rattled the latch loudly and stepped out again. As I did so, the door of Lockridge's room closed, and Claire Prescott came pacing down the passage toward me. She nodded and looked at me curiously.

"I want to see Dolph," I explained. "He has some books I'd like to borrow."

In the Prescott cabin the atmosphere was strained. Dolph's face was tense, and I got the impression he was controlling his emotions only during my presence. I found a book on the shelf—it was Hardy's *Caribbean Primitives*—and left as quickly as I politely could. Even as I closed the door behind me, I heard Dolph's voice, low but pulsing with anger.

"Well, my dear, just how far is this going to go?"

Back in my cabin, I tried to thrust aside all thoughts of this unpleasant triangle that had developed aboard the yacht and thumbed nervously through the book.

I found but a brief mention of Tortola:

Although the people of the Virgins and the Lesser Antilles were Caribs and a different race from the Arawaks of the larger islands, there is evidence that some of them too originated from the Mayans in Yucatan. Traces have been found on Tortola of a degenerate form of worship, obscure sacrifices to the horrible feathered serpent god, Kukulcan, or as he was called farther south, Huitzilopochtli, and other frightful forms of demonology.

I went to bed at length and slept fitfully. Morning, and I entered the tiny salon to find two of the passengers missing. Dolph Prescott, brooding alone over his coffee, informed me sullenly that Claire and Mark Lockridge had gone ashore again "to inspect the tavern in daylight." It was with difficulty that the yacht-owner kept his emotions under control.

As the hours passed and his wife did not return, he grew more

and more irritable. We went up on deck, and from time to time he sent his gaze shoreward, but there was no sign of familiar figures on the beach to call for the gig's return.

Then at a little before noon they finally did appear, and even at that distance there was evidence that both Lockridge and Claire were distraught over something. When they came aboard, Claire's steps were faltering and her face was white.

"I saw it!" were her first words. "You weren't imagining things, Doctor Kennedy. I saw the girl and the white horse . . . saw them both plunge over the cliff. In heaven's name, what spell hangs over this place?"

She slumped limply into a canvas deck chair and ran her kerchief over her face. In a strained voice she explained what had happened on shore. She and Mark Lockridge had spent some time around the tavern without finding anything of interest. But when it came to climbing the tower, Mark had complained that heights made him dizzy. She had therefore mounted the stone steps alone. Reaching the top platform, she had experienced an odd feeling of detachment, as if she were both on the ground below and there on the height at the same time. From then on, much the same had happened to her as had happened to me. She had looked through the niche in the parapet, had noticed the strange clarity or magnification of the view below, and finally had seen the horse and girl rider.

"It was horrible," Claire said. "That poor girl, riding as if she were possessed . . . as if some demon pursued her."

It was easy to see that Dolph Prescott put little stock in this narration, but attributed it to a clever screen contrived by his wife to divert attention from her long stay ashore. For politeness' sake, however, he did ask a few questions. Then Lockridge took up the subject.

"I suppose you could say that a psychic residue of some event

of the past still exists there on the island. You could say that if you were a spiritist."

"I think I shall take a look at that tavern again myself this afternoon," Dolph said. "Frank, you'll go with me."

I confess my nerves were on edge when at two bells Prescott and I left the *Mariegalante* and were rowed ashore. Once again we picked our way across the boulder-strewn strip of sand, climbed the low diff and found ourselves on the road. The island in the daylight appeared strangely unreal. The air was utterly still; not a bird or an insect broke the heavy silence.

We came at length to the ruins of the tavern and began to climb the tower silently. The two of us were bathed in perspiration by the time we reached the top. But, as I had expected, I saw nothing unusual through the niches in the wall. Moreover, the effect of magnification which had been apparent before was now absent. Prescott showed but little interest. His eyes were bloodshot; from time to time he glanced at his watch and then down to where the *Mariegalante* rode at anchor. I realized that I must steer his mind into other channels.

"That settlement on the other side of the island . . . Roadtown, I believe it is called. Perhaps they know more of the tower's origin there. Care to hike it?"

He assented dully. We descended the tower and in spite of the blazing sun set off at a brisk pace. It was the better part of two hours before we swung down a last hillock and entered the sprawling village of Roadtown.

Spanish style, it consisted of a collection of clapboard huts, flanked at one end by a church and at the other by a stone fort overlooking the mile-long harbor.

There were few shops and few white residents. An old Negro woman with a gay-colored kerchief tied about her head answered

our greetings and talked a bit about the island. But when I brought up the subject of the tavern, she put a clay pipe in her mouth and pretended to go to sleep, though I saw she was watching us through half veiled eyes. In the single pub which the town boasted, the barkeeper viewed us with suspicion as he stood polishing his glasses. No, he knew nothing about the other side of the island. His business was here in Roadtown.

We continued through the village. Dozing in the shade of the church wall was a white-haired patriarch of a man who appeared bright and alert in spite of his age. He nodded as we approached.

"How long have I been on Tortola?" he repeated. "A long time, *Senhor*, a very long time."

I put the question point blank. "There's an inn on the other side of the island known as the *Galloping Horse*," I said. "What do you know about it?"

The Portugese' bright little eyes blinked. He slid a Cuban cigarette between his lips and lit it with a match scratched on his belt buckle.

"I know all about it, *Senhor*," he said. "I know . . . but then you are not interested in legends."

"Legends are exactly what we are interested in."

He hesitated. "The place is very old, *Senhor*. It was once visited by Morgan and again by that cruel French buccaneer, L'Olinos. It is said that it was built as a cache for treasure stolen from the Spanish *flota* ships by Pierre le Grand."

"You spoke of legends," I broke in. "Have you ever heard anything of a galloping horse and a girl rider as apparently seen from the top platform of the lookout tower near the tavern?"

The cigarette slipped from his lips as a gleam entered his eyes.

"Have you?" I insisted.

He ran a tongue over toothless gums. Quietly I took out my wallet and drew forth several bills of American currency. The Portugee accepted the money with feigned reluctance.

"I can tell you but little, *Senhor*. Only snatches of a story that has been handed down from one islander to another. During the time the Frenchman, L'Ollinois, stayed at the tavern, the inn-keeper was a man by the name of Besalt. He had a wife, a wild young thing who was forever making eyes at the guests, and once she had seen L'Ollinois, she fell head over heels in love with him.

"Now Besalt recognized the buccaneer for what he was. He warned his wife to have nothing to do with him.

"But as the woman continued her flirtation, Besalt became mad with jealousy. There was a band of Indios on the island at the time who were worshippers of a serpent god. It was said that they practiced horrible sacrifices before an image which stood not far from the tavern. Besalt suspected this to be the trysting place of his wife and L'Ollinois, and he got one of the Indios to help him frighten her. She was a simple girl, and he thought that if he could put fear in her, he would have little trouble with her love affairs in the future.

"I don't know what the Indio did. I do know that he gave Besalt pieces of a strange kind of stone and told him to place them where he could look upon his wife as she returned to the tavern. He also gave him some queer markings to copy and a few strange words to commit to memory.

"On a night when the moon was at the full, Besalt's wife took one of the tavern horses and rode off. A half hour before L'Ollinois had gone the same way. Besalt climbed the tower and placed the stone given him by the Indio in each of the telescope slots.

"He had not long to wait. He looked through the telescope

niche and saw the horse bearing his wife come galloping down the road. The horse left the road and climbed to the cliff edge. But not until it reached the brink did he realize what was happening. Then it was too late."

The old man ceased talking abruptly.

"What happened to L'Ollinois?" I said.

The Portugee shook his head. "That's a matter of question," he said. "He left Tortola, but some say that after that he was hopelessly mad."

"Go on," I prompted.

He stood in silence, then reached into his pocket and drew forth a dirty roll of leather. "Perhaps the *Senhor* would be interested in an Indio charm made of the same kind of stone Besalt used in the telescope niches. Look, *Senhor*. It is very rare."

I looked upon the stone disc, and my interest in the man's story faded. So the whole thing was another tourist's come-on. Doubtless the Portugee kept a supply of these charms to be sold to any gullible listener.

But Prescott took the charm and turned it over and over in his hands.

"How much?" he said quietly.

The day was now well spent, and it was time to think of returning to the yacht. As we headed down the road I glanced at Prescott. Either the Portugee's story had made a great impression on him or he was still worrying about his wife, for his eyes stared into space and his jaw was set hard.

The sun was descending in the west, and shadows began to lengthen across the road. But the air was still stifling, and perspiration stood out on our faces as we paced down the back trail. We were nearing the tavern when suddenly Prescott drew up short and stood staring off to his left.

"What's wrong?" I said.

And then I *felt* it. An invisible aura radiated out of the jungle and descended upon us.

"There's something in there," Prescott said.

Together we plunged into the underbrush and began to fight our way forward. For a dozen yards or more it was island jungle at its worst. Then I sensed a subtle change in the foliage. The brambles and thickets gave way to short grass, yellow and under-nourished from lack of sunlight, and this in turn changed to a flinty topsoil, barren of vegetation of any kind. It was as if we were advancing on unhallowed ground which all life avoided. Only the trees continued, but now they arranged themselves in strange arboreal corridors and galleries, winding before us, ever leading us farther from the road.

Suddenly the corridor widened, and I saw far ahead an open glade. The dying daylight was feeble here, the shadows confusing, but there was a thing of movement in the center of that glade.

Prescott came to a halt. "In heaven's name, what's that?"

A huge figure of incredible stature and coffee-colored features, held in one hand an elliptic shield, in the other, a blue spear. A pointed feathered headdress surmounted its skull, and its naked limbs were mottled with splotches of blue pigment. On either side of the head and near each foot writhed a serpent.

Then it was gone, and Prescott and I paced slowly forward. We entered the glade and stared in disbelief. There was no living creature in evidence; only a crumbling stone platform stood there, its surface covered with carven hieroglyphics. Prescott bent down and began examining these markings. He took out a little leather-bound notebook and copied them carefully. He drew from his pocket the charm sold him by the Roadtown

Portugee and compared the symbols on it with those on the dais. Then, using his pocket knife he began to chip free a small section of the stone.

"It's Kukulcan all right," he said. "There was an image to him here long ago. Kennedy, did you see what I saw?"

"A mirage of some sort," I suggested feebly. "They're common in the tropics, you know."

"Mirage?" he repeated slowly. "Not here. Not here in the jungle."

I looked at the stone he had broken away from the dais, and I saw it was the same lustrous kind of porphyry that had been used to fashion the Portugee's charm . . . the same material that had been mortised in the telescope slots of the lookout tower.

Prescott and I returned to the *Mariegalante* just as the yacht's chronometer was striking eight bells. On deck Lockridge and Claire were waiting for us. I saw Dolph glance at the younger man and then at his wife sharply, but he said nothing.

That night, as if by common agreement, conversation was strained, and when a sulken thunderstorm swept out over Mount Sage, the little dining salon became a place of gloom, which not even the brilliant electric lights could dispel. Then an hour later the clouds were swept away, and the moon rode high and clear. Once again the island was bathed in that blue light.

Strangely enough, it was I who suggested we go ashore again.

The gig made an uneventful trip to the beach. The roadway was full of pot holes of muddy water, and Claire and Lockridge, more agile, gradually increased their lead and were soon lost to view. Over the dinner table Prescott had briefly described the strange dais, though he had avoided all mention of the vision we had seen. When I turned to speak of this now, I saw Dolph too was striding ahead rapidly. I was therefore alone when I reached

the tavern, and in the ancient courtyard I saw no signs of the others.

I crossed to the tower and climbed the circular steps. Emerging on the top platform, I found the yacht owner standing before one of the parapet niches, a pair of night glasses to his eyes.

Silently he turned and handed me the glasses. I saw nothing at first. Then midway down the road a pair of figures focused themselves in the lens. They were Claire and young Lockridge, and they were locked in each other's arms.

Dolph Prescott leaned weakly against the wall; abruptly he roused himself and took off his coat, though the air was still chill from the recent storm. With his hands he began to clear the debris away from the center space of the platform floor.

I stood there in the moonlight watching him. He worked with a strange grim intent. When he had cleared away a section roughly six feet square, he took from his pocket a piece of chalk and began to trace a design.

I felt a strange thrill of excitement as I saw that he was copying the hieroglyphs from the Kukulcan dais.

Prescott knelt. In front of him he placed two objects: the piece of stone he had chiseled from the dais in the jungle glade and the Indio charm given him by the Roadtown Portugee. And as he knelt there he began to chant a low incantation. Strange words and syllables flowed from his lips.

When finally he rose and turned to me, his voice was dry and hard.

"You think I'm mad, Frank? Well, you wouldn't if you had studied comparative religions as I have."

His eyes were contracted, his face, ashen. He took the night glasses again.

"They're going to the dais," he said huskily.

My gaze turned to the nearest niche in the parapet. The white lonely road was etched in sharp relief by the bright moonlight. Below me was desertion, with no sign of movement save the tops of the palmistes waving in the night wind. A deep hush seemed to have fallen over the island.

Far off where that road blurred into the moonlit haze of distance a white shadow appeared. The shadow grew. Now it was racing toward me at incredible speed. It was a horse, with a woman rider. At a pounding gallop the horse swept down the curve of the road. The woman clutched the animal's mane, and her dress whipped and billowed out behind her. Her eyes were wide with terror.

Now they were passing out of sight beyond the tower wall. But in that instant I looked back down the road. And I saw . . .

Was it a shadow caused by a fleeting cloud over the face of the moon? Or was it, a monstrous naked figure, mottled with splotches of blue, arms extended, holding two writhing serpents, advancing down that road in gigantic strides?

Then it too was gone, and I leaped across to the opposite side of the parapet. Straight down the roadway the horse was galloping, but suddenly it veered off and began to climb up toward higher ground. I watched it circle thickets and boulders, mount higher and higher to the cliff edge.

Then horse and rider plunged forward into space!

On April 12th the *Kingston Crown-News* of Jamaica published the following item:

Roadtown, Tortola—The body of Mrs. Dolph Prescott, wife of the well-known millionaire and sportsman, was recovered today from the off-shore waters of the eastern side of this island, a few

hundred yards from the anchorage of the Prescott yacht, *Marie-galante*. Death was attributed by the British warrant officer of Roadtown to accidental drowning.

A curious sidelight was added by the fact that the hand of the drowned woman was found to be clutching a tuft of white hair from a horse's mane. There are no horses on Tortola.

Made in Tanganyika

On his fortieth birthday Martin Sutter decided life was too short to continue in the rut that had been his existence for more than twenty years. He withdrew his savings from the Explosion City Third Federal Bank, stopped in a display room and informed a somewhat surprised clerk he was taking the electric runabout with the blue bonnet. The ground-car, complete with extras, retailed for a tidy three thousand credits.

To accustom himself to the car's controls Sutter chose Highway 56 for a driving lesson. He tooled the electric runabout up into the third level, purred out across state at an effortless two hundred, then descended via a cloverleaf to ground tier and entered a maze of subsidiary roads that led through the summer countryside.

In this manner he drove the major part of the afternoon. Travel was light, away from the elevated lanes and he enjoyed himself.

At four o'clock he began to look for a convenient place to turn around. It was then that he sighted the roadside stand ahead. Above it a freshly painted sign read: TV SETS. LATEST MODELS. SPECIAL WHOLESALE PRICES!

Sutter smiled. Whoever heard of selling television sets on a country highway? It was like—why, it was like selling eggs in the

lobby of the Hotel International! Then it occurred to him that his own TV set had not been in good working order for more than a year. The olfactory control had jammed last week while he was watching a Sumatran tribal ceremony, inland from Soerabaya, and he had been unable to smell the backdrop frangipangi blossoms. It was time he bought a new set . . .

Sutter touched a stud and the electric runabout coasted to a halt. As he climbed out of the car and walked across the highway toward the stand, he thought for a moment there was something wrong with his contact lenses or perhaps his eyes.

The stand and the sign above it appeared to waver uncertainly, to become disjointed as though viewed through uneven glass. But the effect passed and Sutter approached the stand and nodded to the individual tilted back in a chair beside it.

He was a rawboned man with a thatch of thick black hair and small watery eyes. He was dressed, oddly enough, in a pair of tight-fitting trousers of white lawn, a flaming red tunic and a yellow cummerbund.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Can I show you something in a new TV?"

"Where are they?" asked Sutter, surveying the empty stand. Sutter could have sworn he had seen an apple orchard behind the structure as he rode up, but he must have been mistaken for now he saw a low-roofed aluminum-walled building there, huge doors open on one side. It looked, he thought, somewhat like a hangar . . .

Two hours later Sutter arrived back at his home in town. He parked the car, went around to the rear compartment, lifted out a large packing case and carried it to his sitting room. There, with the aid of hammer and crowbar, he stripped away the protective boards and then trundled the cabinet to an unoccupied corner.

It was certainly a unique TV set. A very new model, the salesman had said. The cabinet was shaped like a delta with a cube surmounted on the pointed end of the triangle. The cube held the screen, the triangle, the controls. Finished in a subdued ochre color, the set captured the light of the dying day that filtered through the bay window and gleamed with a soft radiance.

Sutter looked at the control panel and his smile of satisfaction faded somewhat. It looked a little complicated . . .

Instead of the usual knobs there were five small spoked wheels, each closely calibrated in lavender with resilient studs that seemed to be made of plush. Below this was a small dial with the legend, *Element of Probability*, lettered on it.

Sutter was about to switch on the set when the door buzzer sounded. He crossed to the door and pulled it open.

A tall gangly man stood there. Swarthy, face partially covered by a neatly trimmed beard, he looked the conventional picture of a story-book villain. He wore a broad-brimmed hat and an under-slung pipe was clamped in his teeth. He said in a deep booming voice, "Are you Mr. Martin Sutter?"

"Yes, I am. What can I do for you?"

The man said his name was Lucien Travail. He explained that he had been looking for a room and that Mrs. Conworth, the landlady, had informed him she had no vacancies but suggested that her roomer, Mr. Sutter, might be interested in a room-mate.

"Of course I realize you don't know me but I believe our strangeness will be offset by our mutual hobby."

Sutter was silent, waiting for him to continue.

"I collect shells," Travail said.

For thirty years Sutter had pursued a hobby which had begun in his boyhood days during summer vacations at the seashore—the collecting of exoskeletons of mollusks and crustaceans. Long

ago his assortment of cowries, spiny combs and yellow dragon-castles had outgrown their glass cabinet and overflowed into three carefully catalogued packing cases.

To Sutter, anyone who liked shells was a person above suspicion. Thus it was that two days later, after a casual checking of the bearded man's references, he invited Travail to move in with him.

During those two days Sutter tried unsuccessfully to put his new television set into operation. But the set refused to work. Turn the queer dials as he would, all he could get on the elliptical screen was a blur of blinding colors.

On the evening of the third day Travail looked up from his newspaper, "It says here that the president of the Federal Union Congress is going to make a speech in New Paris. Will you tune him in?"

Sutter frowned. "I would," he said, "but my set is out of order. I should call a repair man, but I had hoped to get it regulated myself."

Travail laid down his pipe. "Out of order, eh?" he said. "I'm sort of handy with gadgets. Let me take a look at it."

He walked across to the cabinet, turned it around and stood peering at the complicated chassis. A small brass nameplate caught his eye: *Manufactured by the Tanganyika Company, Dodoma, Empire of Tanganyika, East Africa. Under charter of the Atomic Commercial Enterprise Commission. Warning: Permit only an accredited employee of this company to touch wiring.*

Travail snorted. "Accredited employee, my foot! I know as much about these things as they do."

He went into the kitchen and returned with a screwdriver. While Sutter looked on with apprehensive eyes, he began to tinker with the wiring. Suddenly there was a dull report and a flash of

flame. Travail jerked his arm back as a thin streamer of smoke and the smell of burning insulation entered the room.

"You've broken it," said Sutter accusingly.

But his voice died abruptly as the screen flared into light and a low hum sounded behind the panel. An instant later the light became subdued and a streak of tawny yellow slowly coalesced into a sandy stretch of beach with long rolling swells washing up on it, to recede in a smother of foam. Through the amplifier came the muted roar of the breakers and the low sighing of the wind.

"Well, we got something at any rate," Travail said. "I wonder what it is."

Sutter stared, fascinated. The view of the beach seemed to come into sharper focus as he watched, and he saw now that it was an incredibly lonely scene, with the sea stretching away to a vanishing point and a stand of stunted spruce flanking the width of sand. But what caught his eye and held him almost in a trance was the array of objects littering the sand at the water's edge.

They were shells. Not the prosaic commonplace shells usually found on a New England shore nor even the brighter colored, more intricately formed shells of tropic seas. These were shells he had never seen before, even in a collection. Alien and soft-hued and lovely shells that caused his collector's heart to jump wildly. He saw a delicate star-shaped thing that might have been fashioned of porcelain and enameled with the brush of the Mings. He saw spiral coverings from uncatalogued cephalopods, many chambered and many hued. He saw shells of a thousand shapes and designs, all incredibly beautiful . . .

Sutter forgot everything else as he sat there staring at that collector's paradise.

"I'll see if I can get something else," said Travail.

"No!" said Sutter quickly. "Don't touch it!"

He continued to stare hungrily at the alien shells until suddenly the scene before him grew dim, then faded completely away.

Travail laughed shortly. "Somebody sold you a fluke. This set must be an off brand. Incidentally, isn't Tanganyika a colony governed by the Federal Union Congress?"

"Yes, it is," replied Sutter. "I don't understand this at all. there's no *Empire* of Tanganyika."

Next morning after breakfast Sutter announced that he was driving into the country to visit a friend. There was no reason why he should not have told his room-mate the truth—that he was going to look up the man who had sold him the TV set. No reason except for the odd fact that Travail had made no mention of the alien shells, and Sutter kept thinking that a shell collector would have been immediately aware of the rareness of them.

Once again Sutter drove out across state and down the highway where he had seen the roadside stand. But when he reached the spot there was no sign of the stand. The big oak tree which had shaded it and the rail fence on the adjoining property were there. But no stand. As Sutter stared with perplexed eyes at the spot he saw something he had not noticed before.

At the edge of the highway was a large granite boulder with a bronze plate fastened to its slanting surface. Sutter got out of the car, approached it and read:

This property has been preserved as a State Park to commemorate the first successful trial explosion of the Hydrogen Bomb which took place on this site and marked the beginning of an era.

It seemed to Sutter as he stood there that the surrounding silence grew more intense. Then he passed through a wide gateway and began to stride across an evenly clipped lawn toward a grove of trees beyond. Halfway he paused and glanced absently at his watch. It was exactly twelve o'clock noon.

And abruptly the scene before him slipped out of plumb. The sky and the lawn seemed to alter positions, to rotate madly as in a vortex. The whirling ceased and the next instant Sutter stood on the shore of a lonely sea with a tawny width of sand stretching out before him and the waves washing up almost at his feet. Then he saw the shells . . .

It was the beach of the alien shells! There they lay, scattered about the sand, hundreds, thousands of them, alien and delicate and lovely, exoskeletons the like of which he had never seen before. Their pastel colors blended with one another to form a horizontal rainbow extending into the measureless distance.

And somehow, as Sutter walked among them, picking his way with care, the years of his life seemed to slip away and he was a small boy at the seashore again, entranced with his first shell discovery. He could even hear his mother's voice calling, "Be careful, Martin! Don't go too far!"

He walked on and on, slowly, uncertainly, until the beach and the sea began to waver like a heat mirage. And suddenly the shells and the water vanished and he was on the green grass again with the grove of trees just ahead. He turned, saw a white highway with his car parked on the shoulder.

Dazedly, Sutter walked back to the car . . .

All next morning he ruminated over his strange experience. Toward noon the pieces of the puzzle began to fit slowly together in his mind. But the partial answer at which he arrived seemed too fantastic for belief. Could it be possible that when he had stopped at the roadside stand he had blundered, in some inexplicable way, into another dimension?

Sutter had a layman's knowledge of Einsteinian physics, and he knew that experiments in Time were being made every day. Only last week he had read in the paper of an army officer who had reportedly Time-traveled some twenty-two minutes. And a

year ago the Belgian scientist, Delgar, claimed to have entered a secondary world which he declared impinged on our own.

Assuming all this to be true, then it could be that the Tanganyika television set was a product manufactured in Future Time by a company that, by Sutter's time standards, didn't yet exist.

The following day saw Sutter begin an experiment of which he was rather proud. Travail had said that he had tried to tune in the noon news broadcast yesterday on the TV and had turned the set on from twelve o'clock until five minutes after. At a nearby appliance store Sutter purchased a clock control which would turn his television set on and off at any chosen time. He set the control for two o'clock, then managed to lure Travail out of the house for the afternoon by giving him an invitation he'd received for a lecture on marine life at a local club. Next, he drove again to the H-bomb site and stood waiting, watch in hand, in the grass.

At precisely two o'clock there came that queer staggering of earth and sky. The trees gave way to the stretch of sand; the waves, leaden-colored and cheerless, dotted with white caps rolled up on the lonely shore. As before Sutter felt that same exhilaration, that same reversal to the spirit of his youth. But despite his mental excitement he maintained an awareness of the situation and a remembrance of why he had come here.

When he walked among the shells this time he carried a large basket with him and he picked up shells and dropped them into the basket, selecting those that were the most alien.

In due time the basket was filled to overflowing and Sutter stood still, waiting. Once more the surrounding landscape underwent its change. After the whirling had ceased and the initial

feeling of vertigo had passed Sutter carried the full basket back to the car and began the long drive home.

As he drove he mused over what Travail would say when he saw these shells. Then on second thought, he decided not to show them to him. Travail was getting on his nerves. He had obviously lied about his interest in shells. On discussing the subject with him Sutter found he did not know the first thing about them. In fact, he regretted taking him in as a roommate.

He was convinced that Travail's friendly good-fellowship attitude was just a pose, cloaking a so far mysterious motive. But it could be that Travail knew of the value of Sutter's shell collection. Yesterday a letter had come from the Federal Arts Museum offering five thousand credits for the lot, and while he had made no mention of the amount, Sutter had been foolish enough to tell Travail there had been an offer.

"Are you going to sell?" Travail had asked.

"Certainly not. They're worth five times the price they offered."

"Are they really?" said Travail. "That makes my own collection seem worthless by comparison."

Oh, Travail could be clever all right! Why else had he made no comment about the alien shells they both had seen on the television set, if he did know something of the value of shells?

Arriving home, Sutter entered by the rear door and carried the basket of shells to his bedroom. There he took them out and one by one spread them on the table. He drew a goose-necked lamp down close and from the table drawer took out a powerful atom-magnifying glass. Then he selected one of the larger shells and began to examine it.

After a while he took a small keyhole saw which he kept for such purposes, and very carefully began to cut the shell into

two equal portions. Once again he moved the ato-glass and began to study one of the sections. But the lamp was not very powerful, and insufficient for the tiny details. Sutter abruptly remembered the four-position lamp in the sitting room, hoping that Travail was not there.

To his relief he found the sitting room deserted. The television set stood silent in a corner and as he passed it Sutter switched it on, then crossed to the four-position lamp and turned it up full. For a second time he peered through the ato-glass long and intently.

The bi-sected shell appeared to be a spinal univalve, resembling the familiar cephalopoda, *nautilus*, with thin septa dividing the many chambers.

Behind him the Tanganyika TV swelled on, the screen presenting that same scene of the beach of shells. As it did so Sutter uttered a startled exclamation.

Under the magnifying glass the chambers in the bi-sected shell suddenly became more than outgrowths of marine organism. *They were rooms!* Tessellated ceilings, microscopically mosaic inlaid floors, long sweeping staircases with graceful slender balustrades and tall almost Ionic columns . . .

Heart pounding, Sutter looked again.

He saw that it was actually the light from the television set that was illuminating the interior of the shell, lighting it with a strange radiance that seemed to extend outward from the shell in a steadily widening cone. His hand touched this cone, and it possessed a curious solidity.

He hadn't been mistaken. *There were rooms in that shell!* Narrow corridors with arched doorways opened off alcoves and galleries. One vaulted chamber had a kind of dais in the center of it. The entire inner structure was fashioned of pastel-tinted walls

which caught the light of the TV and radiated it to every corner in a soft glow of effulgence.

Whether the exoskeleton expanded to admit his entrance or whether his own figure magically dwindled he could not tell, but the next instant he found himself in a fairy palace with all about him a world of silence.

A long broad hallway stretched before him. At the far end a ramp angled upward to a higher level. Sutter walked forward slowly, aware in a vague way that he had entered another plane that was at once a microcosm and a macrocosm. On the second level the way ahead divided. After a moment's hesitation he chose the left hand passage, passing through a keyhole-shaped archway into a broad amphitheater, empty of furnishings, with a kind of terrace or gallery at the far end. Emerging upon that gallery, Sutter saw that he had reached the outer limit of the shell. The edges of the wall before him were cut off, jagged and rough, where his saw had done its work.

He was looking out upon the normal world that was his living room.

He stiffened as the door to the room opened and Lucien Travail entered. He sat down before the center table and carefully, systematically began going through the contents of the table drawer. Startled, Sutter watched from his strange vantage point. Travail had not noticed that the television set was turned on, and the high-backed davenport apparently hid the cone of blue light from his view.

He took a sheet of paper from the drawer, began reading it. With a start Sutter recognized his letter from the Federal Arts Museum.

And as a wave of wrath swept over him, Sutter saw that the beach scene on the television set was slowly fading away. Fear

and a realization of his strange position struck him. He turned and ran madly back across the amphitheater, down the ramp and along the long hallway to the point where he had entered the shell. Even as he approached it the cone of blue light dimmed, wavered and was replaced by a wall of partial blackness.

Sutter sent his hands clawing desperately at that wall as it flickered twice and momentarily became translucent again. He forced his body between folds of palpable darkness, slid into the vanishing cone. Instantly he found himself in his normal world, standing in the center of the sitting room. Travail looked up, startled.

"Hullo. Where did you come from?" he said finally.

Sutter said, "What are you doing in my drawer?"

"I was looking for my tobacco pouch," Travail replied easily. "I'm sure I left it here on the table last night. I thought the maid might have put it in the drawer."

In his bedroom Sutter wrapped each of the alien shells in a sheet of newspaper and restored them to the basket. He placed the basket on the top shelf of the closet, concealing it with a couple of old hats.

He didn't sleep well that night. His mind reviewed over and over his strange experience. Toward morning he fell into a deep sleep and dreamed a wild dream of walking down a broad highway, flanked on one side by an endless line of television sets and on the other by man-high hills of alien shells.

He had his breakfast at the little coffee shop around the corner. But halfway back to his apartment he suddenly thought of Travail alone in the house with his shells. He broke into a run and he was panting for breath when he reached his door.

The basket of shells was still on the shelf, but the newspaper wrappings were loosened, and the bi-sected shell was entirely free of covering. And he had not left them that way last evening.

Had atomic transmigration attempted to draw the shells back into the Time sphere to which they really belonged? Sutter was a logical man, and even as this thought came his mind rejected it. It must be Travail. He had taken a sample shell from the basket and even now perhaps was dickering with the officials of the Federal Arts Museum on a price.

Sutter picked up the bi-sected shell and went into the sitting room. He carefully placed the shell upon the table so that the light from the television set would fall directly upon it. Then he sat down to wait.

As he waited he mentally viewed the material prospects of his discovery.

If the Federal Arts Museum had offered five thousand credits for his old collection, they would surely double their price on these rarities. He saw himself the recipient of a fat check, his name and picture in the papers, television interviews, lecture assignments, world fame . . .

And to think that Travail had the brazen nerve to believe he could cash in on his good fortune!

"Damned bearded coot!" Sutter mumbled to himself. "He must take me for an utter fool!"

Footsteps sounded and his roommate entered the room. Was it fancy or did Sutter see in those grey eyes a gleam of mingled avarice and satisfaction?

"Have a cigar?" said Travail casually.

Sutter shook his head. "You know I don't smoke." He crossed the room, adjusted the controls of the television set and watched the familiar beach scene come into sharper focus. As the sound of the washing waves boomed from the speaker, the cone of bluish light took form before the bi-sected shell. Sutter moved the shell slightly so that it lay at directly right angles to the panel of the TV set. Travail, drawing on his cigar, watched him curiously.

"What are you doing?" he asked at length.

"Little experiment. Stand over here and I'll show you. Here, in front of this cone of light."

Travail took the place indicated. His face was emotionless as he looked beyond the light into the bi-sected shell.

"Now walk forward," commanded Sutter.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said Travail, starting to back away. "What are you up to anyway?"

Sutter had no plan in mind beyond an overwhelming desire to put a bad fright into his roommate in payment for what he considered a monstrous act of duplicity. It would serve Travail right if, once he entered the secondary plane of the shell, he would be forced to stay there a while. A good scare would cause him to leave, maybe.

Sutter moved up behind the bearded man and gave him a violent shove forward. "In you go!" he cried hysterically.

Travail pitched head foremost. But, spinning, he clutched at Sutter's arm, gripping it with the desperation of a drowning man. Half inside, half outside the cone of blue light he seemed propelled into the depths of the bi-sected shell by an irresistible force. In vain did Sutter fight to release the hold upon his arm. His squirming legs fastened themselves about the legs of a heavy Windsor chair, kicked frantically.

The chair spun from between his feet and lurched heavily across the room where it fell hard upon the television set, shattering the glowing screen into a thousand fragments. Simultaneously, Sutter slid forward into the bi-sected shell as the cone of light vanished after him. . .

Mrs. Conworth, the landlady, reported the disappearance of her two roomers on August first, a week after she last saw them. First, however, to the disgust of the police, she cleaned their apart-

ment, giving to the trash man all valueless and inconsequential articles, including a box of old sea shells which she found in the closet. It was a curious fact that neither Sutter nor Travail possessed relatives or friends to make inquiry as to their whereabouts and thus without incentive the official search died into nothing.

Mrs. Conworth rather regretted the loss of her bachelor roomers and, as she said to her neighbor, she kept one memento of them—a thing that looked like a shell but wasn't a shell. She thought it must be one of them optical illusion things.

"When you look at it in a certain way," said Mrs. Conworth, "it seems as if there are two tiny men inside it, fighting to get out"

Matthew South and Company

In the Trinidad statistical offices at Port-of-Spain his birth was recorded in the year 1907 under the name of Henry Gibson Walters. It was a good name with representatives of every generation for the past two hundred years having done their share to establish its history of honest endeavor and character. True, the Walters had never accomplished anything dramatic or exciting, but they had been good tradesmen, good barristers, good scholars. Yet Henry Walters disliked the name fervently, and it was a quirk of his that he avoided using it on every occasion he could.

Not that he ever resorted to forgery or anything of the kind, of course. He simply liked the sound and connotation of odd names, and he was forever making up different combinations and using them for such harmless things as subscriptions, delivered packages and personal stationery.

Walters received *Punch* and *The Fortnightly Review* under the name of James K. Vermont. He had an extra library card made out to Philip Spayne, and he carried on various correspondence with the signature, Richard Campeau. Just why he did these things he did not exactly know, although he suspected, not unwisely, that it was the result of a mild frustration.

This frustration, however, was not financial, for he enjoyed a splendid income from his sugar mill and he lived in an imposing

villa in the fashionable St. Clair district of Port-of-Spain. He lived alone, excepting his servants, his wife having passed on several years before.

He liked to think of James K. Vermont as an American sportsman, a carefree fellow who played polo and rode with grace and ease. In Philip Spayne—a good example of euphony with its “l” and “n” sound—he saw a polished and cultured student of crime detection, a gentleman sleuth who solved his cases with the aid of erudite dissertations on Egyptian hieroglyphics or Polynesian philosophy.

One blistering hot day in February Walters sat in his library engaged in his favorite pastime. The French windows were open to the garden and through them wafted the smell of hibiscus, magnolia and tarter bush. In his notebook Walters scribbled several names which his surroundings suggested to him. First he wrote Arden Garden, but he crossed a line through that as being too facetious. Then he wrote Oliver Green and considered that a long moment. The play on the double color was good, but there was nothing unusual in it. After a moment he jotted down Flowers—Alexander Flowers.

Bad. It seemed he had just about utilized every likely combination during the last few years. And yet he knew that that for which he was seeking—the ultimate—had not yet occurred to him.

It must be the essence of euphony; it must be unique and pleasing to the eye as well as to the ear. Walters knew he would have little use for such a name if and when he did find it. He was not a writer, and he certainly was not an actor. But for a long time now the lure of intellectual satisfaction had kept him searching.

The south wind blew in fitfully from the garden; he took up the pencil again and after a moment wrote *Matthew South*. Then he paused while a little thrill swept through him. Matthew

South! The name was not particularly attractive. As a matter of fact, the double "th" sound gave it a lisping quality that was unpleasant. But somehow the combination struck a responsive chord deep within him.

He wrote it again, several times. What kind of man would Matthew South be? After a moment he smiled sheepishly. He was taking his little hobby too seriously. Besides, it was time to make ready for his trip to the club and his regular game of whist.

He went to his room and dressed carefully: a thin, wiry man with a lean incisive face and dreamy eyes partially hidden by the newest type heavy-rimmed glasses. But instead of putting on his blue striped suit as he always did for this occasion, he found himself donning a white dinner jacket. Almost as if he expected to meet someone.

The Caribbean Club was opposite the Savannah, and Walters took a cab. Arriving, he went directly to the smoking lounge. He had reached the door and was about to open it when a small placard caught his eye:

Closed.

Lounge Undergoing Repairs.

Damnation! He had forgotten about the new arched ceiling that was being installed, the appropriation for which he had voted himself only last week.

He opened the door slightly and peered in. Scaffolding was lined up against the walls, ladders were scattered about, and the floor was littered with rolls of canvas and chunks of plaster. A single unshaded drop-light, apparently left by some workman, illuminated the room.

But Walters saw something else, and a little murmur of satisfaction escaped him as he opened the door wider. A card table had been set up in a far corner of the room, and around it sat

three men playing cards. Walters could see the men's faces vaguely; a haze of tobacco smoke coiled about the table, but all three seemed to be strangers.

"Tourists probably," Walters told himself. "Or, maybe that oil men's convention from the States. Well, there should be room for a fourth."

He entered the room and paced across to the table, where he stood a moment, watching the play. The three men continued passing cards back and forth across the table without looking up.

One of them, a tall man with gray eyes, studied his cards intently. He was dressed conservatively in a dark suit, and he wore an expensive wrist-watch. Across from him a somewhat younger man, clad in a tweed sports coat and gay colored tie smoked a cigarette in a long holder.

But it was the third man who held Walters' gaze. He was tall and dark, and he was clad in a perfect fitting double-breasted tuxedo. There was something indefinable about his eyes—a sardonic glitter that seemed to look upon the others with half amusement.

Something about the men gave Walters the impression that he had known them somewhere in the past. And yet that was impossible; he had never seen any of them before.

The man in the tuxedo looked up. "Mr. Walters," he said, "Wouldn't you care to sit in for a few games?"

"You know who I am?" Walters said in some surprise.

"I wouldn't be likely not to know it."

After this somewhat puzzling exchange of pleasantries, Walters found himself seated at the table, engaged in his favorite pastime, whist. He played well, and during the course of the games he won with sufficient regularity to keep his interest at the highest pitch. Indeed so great was his absorption that more than an hour passed before it dawned upon him that none of the three had made any effort to introduce himself.

"You know," he said, "I usually play here with the same three chaps. But all three have motored up San Fernando way to do some fishing. Perhaps you know them: Parker, Stewart, and Mandon—Stephen Mandon?"

The man in the tuxedo shook his head and stood up. "I'm sorry, but I have an engagement. Have you a lighter? My cigar seems to have gone out."

Walters produced a gold lighter, handed it across.

"Well, cheerio."

He stepped briskly to the door and was passing through it when Walters remembered his lighter.

The lounge opened directly on the Club lobby, and as Walters strode rapidly in pursuit into the latter room now, he found his way blocked by a number of friends who had come in from the terrace. Several moments passed before he was able to break away. When he did, there was no sign of the man in the tuxedo. Then he saw him.

He was bent over a little table by the entrance, writing in the guest book. Walters strode forward, but even as he did, the man tossed down the pen and passed hatless out into the street.

Walters reached the table and glanced down at the open page. A shock swept through him from head to foot.

In still wet ink the written words read:

Matthew South and Company.

Somebody with a perverted sense of humor must be pulling his leg. For a long moment he stood there, then he swung about and retraced his steps to the lounge.

He entered and drew up short. The two men had vanished!

At home that night Walters tried to tell himself that he must have seen the name, Matthew South, in the newspaper and recalled it out of his subconscious by a simple process of sight or sound association.

In deep thought, he undressed slowly. But before retiring he experienced a desire to see again how that magic name looked in writing. Accordingly, he descended to his library, sat down before the desk and reached for his notebook.

The notebook was not in the drawer. He glanced at the open window across the room and suddenly remembered. He had left the book on the edge of the desk just above the wastebasket. The wind must have blown it into the basket, and Benjamin must have emptied the basket, following his daily custom.

Walters rose, crossed the room and tugged at the bell-pull. But even as he did, he remembered that Benjamin was no longer with him. The old servant had finally become too feeble, and he had been forced to hire a younger man to care for his personal needs. The newcomer, a Haitian who went by the name of Kingsley, had brought with him his native voodoo religion, and he had insisted on practicing it at the most outlandish times.

Twice when he had had guests in for the evening, Walters had been disconcerted to hear a low moaning chant coming from the servants' quarters, accompanied by a muffled throb of a drum. On three separate occasions he had come upon Kingsley crouched before a crudely carved wooden image.

A step sounded in the outer corridor and Kingsley entered the room. He was a tall, well-built Negro with a sly look in his eyes.

"Did you empty the wastebasket?" Walters demanded.

"Yes, sar."

"Did you see my notebook in it?"

"Notebook?" The Negro looked puzzled.

"A small book with leather covers."

"No, sar."

It was impossible to tell whether the fellow was lying or not, but the matter wasn't worth further argument. Walters nodded

in dismissal, switched off the lights and returned to his bedroom.

He fell asleep almost at once and began to dream a strangely vivid dream. He saw himself sit before his desk, and begin to write. But this was the queer part of the dream: He wrote only one name over and over again.

In the morning when he awoke he became aware of a strange lethargy and a lameness of his right wrist. But when he went into the library to open his morning mail he received a shock. There was a sheet of writing paper on the desk top, and it had been written upon so many times, the surface was almost black with ink. Words were distinguishable here and there, however, and he could see the name, Matthew South, copied again and again.

Walters spent a miserable day. At his sugar mill office he caught himself beginning his dictating, "Mr. M. South," and then had to go back and consult his name pad for the correct name of the addressee. His secretary looked at him queerly.

Dressing for the club again that night, he rang for Kingsley. The Negro did not answer the summons, and Walters, his temper already on edge, strode in search of him. He found the Negro in his room squatting in the center of the floor. Before him he had traced in chalk a rude circle, and in the center of that circle was a little pile of dirt, some broken eggshells and what appeared to be several small bones. But it was the object that lay a little to the side that caught Walters' eye. His notebook, open to its last page of written names.

White with rage, he swept his foot through the debris on the floor and brought his clenched fist crashing down upon Kingsley's head.

"I told you I'd stand for no more of this tomfoolery."

The Negro's eyes blazed. He said nothing while Walters placed the book in his pocket and strode to the door, ordering him "to clean up this mess."

All the way to the club Walters relived the unpleasant incident,

and his anger was slow to die. Damned superstitious heathens! If there was anything that irritated him, it was the stupid persistence of these West Indians in reverting to the black rites of their ancestors.

Entering the club lobby, he advanced to the desk and inquired if the three men with whom he usually played—Parker, Stewart, and Mandon—had returned from their San Fernando fishing trip. The regular clerk, however, was not on duty and the new man didn't seem to know. Walters headed for the lounge.

The placard notifying guests that the room was closed for repairs was still on the door. Inside the single drop-light was lit over the card table, but there was no sign of the three men Walters had played with the night before. Nevertheless he entered the room and strode forward hesitantly. A deck of cards lay on the table. He picked them up idly, thumbed through them, then began playing solitaire.

As he played, he was vaguely conscious of a far-off ringing. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a telephone on the floor left apparently by the workmen after removing the room's furniture. He moved to the instrument and said, "Hello."

A voice began speaking, but so remote as to be almost inaudible.

"Speak louder," Walters said. "I can't hear you."

"This is Philip Spayne talking, one of the three men who played cards with you last evening."

"Philip Sp— . . !"

"Please listen closely. I have followed Matthew South down here from Havana, where he is wanted for a serious crime. This is to put you on your guard. Watch yourself but say nothing to anybody."

The connection was severed with a click. Walters went back into the lobby, said to the telephone operator: "Could you tell me where that last call came from, the one put through to the lounge?"

The girl stared. "The lounge is closed," she said.

"I know, but . . ."

"And the phone there has been disconnected."

Sweat broke out on Walters' forehead. Yet when he re-entered the lounge, a feeling of inner quiet stole over him. Almost as he had expected, the three men were there, seated about the card table.

The man who called himself Matthew South, spoke.

"Good evening, Mr. Walters. Would you care to sit in?"

Again the game was whist. Once South called the man opposite "Mr. Spayne," and once that individual referred to the third member of the group as "Mr. Vermont." Walters by this time was beyond all stages of bewilderment. He played like an automaton.

At length South stood up. "I've had enough," he said. "Going for a stroll. Coming, any of you?"

The man called Spayne shook his head, but Vermont nodded. "Don't mind if I do," he said.

Walters found himself joining the two. They left the club and began to walk slowly down Queen's Park West, heading toward the Savannah. The night was dark, and as the street lights dropped behind, fireflies began to dot the blackness. From the hedges came the warm odor of hibiscus.

None of them spoke. South puffed slowly at a cigar, and Vermont paced along, apparently absorbed in the beauties of the night.

Abreast of the darkened race-track grandstand, South suddenly came to a halt. He stooped and picked up a flat slab of rock, placed it in Walters' hands. Vermont, who had paced on a short distance, turned. South pointed at the man.

"Throw!"

Something whirled inside Walters' head. The compulsion was overwhelming. He brought his arm back and threw the stone.

As in a daze he saw Vermont collapse on the walk, blood

streaming from his head. Matthew South turned and without further word began to walk rapidly back toward the club.

Walters reached his house in a state of exhaustion. As the quiet closed in on him, he told himself that he couldn't possibly have committed the crime. It was all his nerves.

But suppose he hadn't imagined the incident and the man lay dead there now on the walk!

He went to bed at length and lapsed into a heavy slumber from which a single dream rose to torment him. Again he saw himself descending the stairs to the library, open his notebook and begin to write at a feverish pace.

To Walters' overwhelming relief the morning newspaper contained nothing of a murdered man found near the Savannah.

He turned to his mail, read and tossed letters aside for more than a half hour before he came upon one from his old card-game friend, Stewart. It read in part:

"... answering your question as to whether I can recommend a good man servant. It so happens that my own man has a brother who goes by the name of Kingsley whom I would recommend with some reservations.

"Kingsley served me for a brief period when the chap I regularly employ was ill. He was also employed for a while by our mutual friends, Parker and Mandon. I think they will agree with me that he does his duties efficiently, and if you can put up with his spells of voodooism, he shouldn't cause you too much trouble."

The letter was late. He had already hired the servant, and it struck him as an odd coincidence that he should have chosen the very man Stewart had recommended.

At noon the next day, Walters received a telephone call from his old friend, Warrant Officer Hugh Edmonds.

"It's about your man, Kingsley," Edmonds said. "We've been watching him. He's been acting queer of late. Did you know he leaves your house every night about midnight?"

"He does?" said Walters. "Where does he go?"

"That's the funny part of it. He goes straight to the cemetery and prowls around there for a half hour or so. So far all we've been able to find on him is a little box of grave dirt. Anyway, I thought I'd tell you."

"I'm glad you did," said Walters. "I'll speak to him."

With the press of other business matters, however, he forgot.

At the club his experience was similar to the night before. He entered the closed lounge and saw the card table with the single drop-light. Only one man sat there this time. For a brief instant Walters thought it was Stewart. Then he saw that it was the man who called himself Philip Spayne.

As Walters sat down, Spayne leaned forward and spoke huskily.

"South will be here in a moment. Try and act calm. I have evidence against him, and I'll have extradition papers by morning."

A moment later South came in, slightly breathless. "Gentlemen," he said, "I've just arranged to purchase a piece of property up by San Fernando. It may be worthless, but I'm led to believe there's oil on it. Would you two care to drive into town with me and witness the transaction?"

Walters started to decline, but as he glanced across the table Spayne gave him a slow nod.

They entered a cab and headed down Queen's Park West. Walters sat between the two men, and glancing at Spayne, he saw that the man was watching Matthew South and that he kept his right hand in his coat pocket.

Down Frederick Street, across Marine Square and up Weigh-ton Road the cab sped. The streets grew darker, more deserted as they approached the waterfront.

Before a dark building the cab drew up. Every instinct now warned Walters to be on his guard.

"In here, gentlemen," South said.

He stood aside, waiting for them to pass. In that instant South's hand brushed against Walters', placed there a short wooden cudgel. Then South was opening the door, stepping into a black passageway, Spayne followed a step behind, but as Walters passed across the threshold, he heard South's voice utter a sharp command.

"Now!"

Fire lanced into Walters' brain. Another will seemed to take control of his arm; then with a little murmur of submission, he brought the cudgel crashing down upon Spayne's head.

He turned and charged out the door. Halfway up the dark street he saw South running head down, shoulders hunched forward. Walters leaped in pursuit.

An hour later he entered his house. Somewhere back in the silent streets he had lost his hat; his hair was disheveled, and his eyes were bloodshot. He had come here mechanically, like a homing pigeon, after all efforts to capture Matthew South had failed.

He went slowly up to his bedroom, opened a magazine and forced himself to read. Sweat began to ooze out on his forehead. Time dragged past.

Below him he heard a knocking on the front door of the house. The latch was tried, the door opened, and footsteps crossed the lower floor corridor.

Walters crossed to his chiffonier, opened the middle drawer, and took out a revolver. Then he descended the staircase. At the entrance to the library he paused.

"Good evening, Walters."

Matthew South sat there in the chair opposite the desk. His legs were crossed and he was leaning back against the cushions comfortably. He was smoking a cigar.

As he stood, silently answering the man's gaze, all the hatred

Walters had for him welled to the surface. In his mind's eye he saw again the two vicious attacks for which South and South alone was responsible. He saw again the diabolic cold-blooded yet cunning manner in which South had maneuvered him into the role of a juggernaut.

"What's wrong, Walters?"

Calmly and deliberately Walters raised the revolver. His mind was a great maw of emptiness as he took aim and squeezed the trigger. The man in the chair half rose with a look of surprise; then as blood began to stain his shirt front, he slumped slowly backward.

The Walters' Affair, as it came to be known, raised a furor in Caribbean Club circles. Mr. Hornby, the club secretary, discussed it with a group of members on the terrace the Friday evening after the night Walters' and Stewart's bodies were found. With Walters, it was obviously a case of suicide, for the gun was still clenched in his hand. But with Stewart, there was a lot left to be explained.

"I can't understand it," Hornby said. "I can't offer the slightest reason for Walters murdering his three friends, Stewart, Parker and Mandon. There's absolutely no motive."

"Are the police sure he killed Parker and Mandon too?" a guest asked.

"Beyond a doubt. Walters' fingerprints were found on the rock and the cudgel that were used to club Parker and Mandon to death. Parker's body was partially concealed by a hedge and wasn't discovered right away. The man must have been mad; that's the only answer tenable.

"What will happen to Walters' servants now that he's dead?" another guest queried.

Hornby frowned. "Look for new employment, I suppose. All except his man, Kingsley. He seems to have disappeared."

Long Voyage

A soft gentle rain began to fall as we emerged from the dark woods and came out onto the shore. There it was, the sea, stretching as far as the eye could reach, gray and sullen, and flecked with greenish white froth. The blue *bensorr* trees, crowding close to the water's edge, were bent backward as if frightened by the bleakness before them. The sand, visible under the clear patches of water, was a bleached white like the exposed surface of a huge bone.

We stood there a moment in silence. Then Mason cleared his throat huskily.

"Well, here goes," he said. "We'll soon see if we have any friends about."

He unslung the pack-sack from his shoulders, removed its protective outer shield and began to assemble the organic surveyor, an egg-shaped ball of white carponium secured to a segmented forty-foot rod. While Brandt and I raised the rod with the aid of an electric fulcrum, Mason carefully placed his control cabinet on a piece of outcropping rock and made a last adjustment.

The moment had come. Even above the sound of the sea, you could hear the strained breathing of the men. Only Navigator Norris appeared unconcerned. He stood there calmly smoking his pipe, his keen blue eyes squinting against the biting wind.

Mason switched on the speaker. Its high-frequency scream rose deafeningly above us and was torn away in unsteady gusts. He began to turn its center dial, at first a quarter circle, and then all the way to the final backstop of the calibration. All that resulted was a continuation of that mournful ululation like a wail out of eternity.

Mason tried again. With stiff wrists he tuned while perspiration stood out on his forehead, and the rest of us crowded close.

"It's no use," he said. "This pickup failure proves there isn't a vestige of animal life on Stragella—on this hemisphere of the planet, at least."

Navigator Norris took his pipe from his mouth and nodded. His face was expressionless. There was no indication in the man's voice that he had suffered another great disappointment, his sixth in less than a year.

"We'll go back now," he said, "and we'll try again. There must be some planet in this system that's inhabited. But it's going to be hard to tell the women."

Mason let the surveyor rod down with a crash. I could see the anger and resentment that was gathering in his eyes. Mason was the youngest of our party and the leader of the antagonistic group that was slowly but steadily undermining the authority of the Navigator.

This was our seventh exploratory trip after our sixth landing since entering the field of the sun, Ponthis. Ponthis with its sixteen equal sized planets, each with a single satellite. First there had been Coulora; then in swift succession, Jama, Tenethon, Mokrell, and R-9. And now Stragella. Strange names of strange worlds, revolving about a strange star.

It was Navigator Norris who told us the names of these planets and traced their positions on a chart for us. He alone of our

group was familiar with astrogation and cosmography. He alone had sailed the spaceways in the days before the automatic pilots were installed and locked and sealed on every ship.

A handsome man in his fortieth year, he stood six feet three with broad shoulders and a powerful frame. His eyes were the eyes of a scholar, dreamy yet alive with depth and penetration. I had never seen him lose his temper, and he governed our company with an iron hand.

He was not perfect, of course. Like all Earthmen, he had his faults. Months before he had joined with that famed Martian scientist, Ganeth-Klae, to invent that all-use material, *Indurate*, the formula for which had been stolen and which therefore had never appeared on the commercial market. Norris would talk about that for hours. If you inadvertently started him on the subject a queer glint would enter his eyes, and he would dig around in his pocket for a chunk of the black substance.

"Did I ever show you a piece of this?" he would say. "Look at it carefully. Notice the smooth grainless texture—hard and yet not brittle. You wouldn't think that it was formed in a gaseous state, then changed to a liquid and finally to a clay-like material that could be worked with ease. A thousand years after your body has returned to dust, that piece of *Indurate* will still exist, unchanged, unworn. Erosion will have little effect upon it. Beside it granite, steel are nothing. If only I had the formula . . ."

But he had only half the formula, the half he himself had developed. The other part was locked in the brain of Ganeth-Klae, and Ganeth-Klae had disappeared. What had become of him was a mystery. Norris perhaps had felt the loss more than any one, and he had offered the major part of his savings as a reward for information leading to the scientist's whereabouts.

Our party—eighteen couples and Navigator Norris—had gathered together and subsequently left Earth in answer to a curious

advertisement that had appeared in the Sunday edition of the *London Times*.

WANTED: *A group of men and women, young, courageous, educated, tired of political and social restrictions, interested in extra-terrestrial colonization. Financial resources no qualification.*

After we had been weeded out, interviewed and rigorously questioned, Norris had taken us into the hangar, waved a hand toward the *Marie Galante* and explained the details.

The *Marie Galante* was a cruiser type ship, stripped down to essentials to maintain speed, but equipped with the latest of everything. For a short run to Venus, for which it was originally built, it would accommodate a passenger list of ninety.

But Norris wasn't interested in that kind of run. He had knocked out bulkheads, reconverted music room and ballroom into living quarters. He had closed and sealed all observation ports, so that only in the bridge cuddy could one see into space.

"We shall travel beyond the orbit of the sun," he said. "There will be no turning back for the search for a new world, a new life."

Aside to me, he said: "You're to be the physician of this party, Bagley. So I'm going to tell you what to expect when we take off. We're going to have some mighty sick passengers aboard then."

"What do you mean, sir?" I said.

He pointed with his pipe toward the stern of the vessel. "See that . . . well, call it a booster. Ganeth-Klae designed it just before he disappeared, using the last lot of *Indurate* in existence. It will increase our take-off speed by five times, and it will probably have a bad effect on the passengers."

So we had left Earth, at night from a field out in Essex. Without orders, without clearance papers, without an automatic pilot check. Eighteen couples and one navigator—destination un-

known. If the Interstellar Council had known what Norris was up to, it would have been a case for the Spacetime Commission.

Of that long initial lap of our voyage, perhaps the less said the better. As always is the case when monotony begins to wear away the veneer of civilization, character quirks came to the surface, cliques formed among the passengers, and gossip and personalities became matters of pre-eminent importance.

Rising to the foreground out of our thirty-six, came Fielding Mason, tall, taciturn, and handsome, with a keen intellect and a sense of values remarkable in so young a man. Mason was a graduate of Montapé, the French outgrowth of St. Cyr. But he had majored in military tactics, psychology and sociology and knew nothing at all about astrogation or even elemental astronomy. He too was a man of good breeding and refinement. Nevertheless conflict began to develop between him and Navigator Norris. That conflict began the day we landed on Coulora.

Norris stepped out of the air lock into the thin cold air, glanced briefly about him and faced the eighteen men assembled.

"We'll divide into three groups," he said. "Each group to carry an organic surveyor and take a different direction. Each group will so regulate its marching as to be back here without fail an hour before darkness sets in. If you find no sign of animal life, then we will take off again immediately on your return."

Mason paused halfway in the act of strapping on his pack sack.

"What's that got to do with it?" he demanded. "There's vegetation here. That's all that seems to be necessary."

Norris lit his pipe. "If you find no sign of animal life we will take off immediately on your return," he said as if he hadn't heard.

But the strangeness of Coulora tempered bad feelings then. The blue *hansorr* trees were actually not trees at all but a huge cat-tail-like growth, the stalks of which were quite transparent.

In between the stalks grow curious cabbage-like plants that changed from red to yellow as an intruder approached and back to red again after he had passed. Rock outcroppings were everywhere, but all were eroded and in places polished smooth as glass.

There was a strange kind of dust that acted as though endowed with life. It quivered when trod upon, and the outline of our footsteps slowly rose into the air, so that looking back I could see our trail floating behind us in irregular layers.

Above us the star that was this planet's sun shown bright but faintly red as if it were in the first stages of dying. The air though thin was fit to breathe, and we found it unnecessary to wear space suits. We marched down the corridors of *bensorr* trees, until we came to an open spot, a kind of glade. And that was the first time Mason tuned his organic surveyor and received absolutely nothing.

There was no animal life on Coulora!

Within an hour we had blasted off again. The forward-impact delivered by the Ganeth-Klae booster was terrific, and nausea and vertigo struck us all simultaneously. But again, with all ports and observation shields sealed shut, Norris held the secret of our destination.

On July twenty-second the ship gave that sickening lurch and came once again to a standstill.

"Same procedure as before," Norris said, stepping out of the airlock. "Those of you who desire to have their wives accompany you may do so. Mason, you'll make a final correlation on the organic surveyors. If there is no trace of animal life return here before dark."

Once our group was out of sight of the ship, Mason threw down his pack sack, sat down on a boulder and lighted a cigarette.

"Bagley," he said to me, "has the Old Man gone loco?"

"I think not," I said, frowning. "He's one of the most evenly balanced persons I know."

"Then he's hiding something," Mason said. "Why else should he be so concerned with finding animal life?"

"You know the answer to that," I said. "We're here to colonize, to start a new life. We can't very well do that on a desert."

"That's poppycock," Mason replied, flinging away his cigarette. "When the Albertson expedition first landed on Mars, there was no animal life on the red planet. Now look at it. Same thing was true when Breslauer first settled Pluto. The colonies there got along. I tell you Norris has got something up his sleeve, and I don't like it."

Later, after Mason had taken his negative surveyor reading, the flame of trouble reached the end of its fuse!

Norris had given orders to return to the *Marie Galante*, and the rest of us were sullenly making ready to start the back trail. Mason, however, deliberately seized his pick and began chopping a hole in the rock surface, preparatory apparently to erecting his plastic tent.

"We'll make temporary camp here," he said calmly. "Brandt, you can go back to the ship and bring back the rest of the women." He turned and smiled sardonically at Navigator Norris.

Norris quietly knocked the ashes from his pipe and placed it in his pocket. He strode forward, took the pick from Mason's hands and flung it away. Then he seized Mason by the coat, whipped him around and drove his fist hard against the younger man's jaw.

"When you signed on for this voyage, you agreed to obey my orders," he said, not raising his voice. "You'll do just that."

Mason picked himself up, and there was an ugly glint in his eyes. He could have smashed Norris to a pulp, and none knew it better than the Navigator. For a brief instant the younger man

swayed there on the balls of his feet, fists clenched. Then he let his hands drop, walked over and began to put on his pack sack.

But I had seen Mason's face, and I knew he had not given in as easily as it appeared. Meanwhile he began to circulate among the passengers, making no offers, yet subtly enlisting backers for a policy, the significance of which grew on me slowly. It was mutiny he was plotting! And with his personal charm and magnetism he had little trouble in winning over converts. I came upon him arguing before a group of the women one day, among them his own wife, Estelle. He was standing close to her.

"We have clothing and equipment and food concentrate," Mason said. "Enough to last two generations. We have brains and intelligence, and we certainly should be able to establish ourselves without the aid of other vertebrate forms of life.

"Coulora, Jama, Tenethon, Mokrell, R-9, and Stragella. We could have settled on any one of those planets, and apparently we should have, for conditions have grown steadily worse at each landing. But always the answer is no. Why? Because Norris says we must go on until we find animal life."

He cleared his throat and gazed at the feminine faces before him. "Go where? What makes Norris so sure he'll find life on any planet in this system? And incidentally where in the cosmos is this system?"

One of the women stirred uneasily. "What do you mean?" she said.

"I mean we don't know where we are or where we're going, and I don't think Norris does either. *We're lost!*"

That was in August. By the last of September we had landed on two more planets, to which Norris gave the simple names of R-12 and R-14. Each had crude forms of vegetable life, represented principally by the blue *bensorr* trees, but in neither case did the organic surveyor reveal the slightest traces of animal life.

There was, however, a considerable difference in physical appearance between R-12 and R-14, and for a time that fact excited Norris tremendously. Up to then, each successive planet, although similar in size, had exhibited signs of greater age than its predecessor. But on R-12 there were definite manifestations of younger geologic development.

Several pieces of shale lay exposed under a fold of igneous rock. Two of those pieces contained fossils of highly developed *ga-noids*, similar to those found on Venus. They were perfectly preserved.

It meant that animal life had existed on R-12, even if it didn't now. It meant that R-12, though a much older planet than Earth, was still younger than Stragella or the rest.

For a while Norris was almost beside himself. He cut out rock samples and carried them back to the ship. He personally supervised the tuning of the surveyors. And when he finally gave orders to take off, he was almost friendly to Mason, whereas before his attitude toward him had been one of cold aloofness.

But when we reached R-14, our eighth landing, all that passed. For R-14 was old again, older than any of the others.

And then, on October sixteenth, Mason opened the door of the locked cabin. It happened quite by accident. One of the conduits broke in the *Marie Galante's* central passageway, and the resulting explosion grounded the central feed line of the instrument equipment. In a trice the passageway was a sheet of flame, rapidly filling with smoke from burning insulation.

Norris, of course, was in the bridge cuddy with locked doors between us and him, and now with the wiring burned through there was no way of signalling him he was wanted for an emergency. In his absence Mason took command.

That passageway ran the full length of the ship. Midway down it was the door leading to the women's lounge. The explosion had

jammed that door shut, and smoke was pouring forth from under the sill. All at once one of the women rushed forward to announce hysterically that Mason's wife, Estelle, was in the lounge.

Adjoining the lounge was a small cabin which since the beginning of our voyage had remained locked. Norris had given strict orders that that cabin was not to be disturbed. We all had taken it as a matter of course that it contained various kinds of precision instruments.

Now, however, Mason realized that the only way into the lounge was by way of that locked cabin. If he used a heat blaster on the lounge door there was no telling what would happen to the woman inside.

He tipped the emergency blaster from its wall mounting, pressed it to the magnetic latch of the sealed cabin door and pressed the stud. An instant later he was leading his frightened wife, Estelle, out through the smoke.

The fire was quietly extinguished and the wiring spliced. Then when the others had drifted off, Mason called Brandt and me aside.

"We've been wondering for a long time what happened to Ganeth-Klae, the Martian inventor who worked with Norris to invent *Indurate*," he said very quietly. "Well, we don't need to wonder any more. He's in there."

Brandt, and I stepped forward over the sill—and drew up short. Ganeth-Klae was there all right, but he would never trouble himself about making a voyage in a locked cabin. His rigid body was encased in a transparent block of amber-colored solidifex, the after-death preservative used by all Martians.

Both of us recognized his still features at once, and in addition his name-tattoo, required by Martian law, was clearly visible on his left forearm.

For a brief instant the discovery stunned us. Klæe dead? Klæe whose IQ had become a measuring guide for the entire system, whose Martian head held more ordinary horse sense, in addition to radical postulations on theoretical physics, than anyone on the planets. It wasn't possible.

And what was the significance of his body on Norris' ship? Why had Norris kept its presence a secret and why had he given out the story of Klæe's disappearance?

Mason's face was cold as ice. "Come with me, you two," he said. "We're going to get the answer to this right now."

We went along the passage to the circular staircase. We climbed the steps, passed through the scuttle and came to the door of the bridge cuddy. Mason drew the bar and we passed in. Norris was bent over the chart table. He looked up sharply at the sound of our steps.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" he said.

It didn't take Mason long to explain. When he had finished, he stood there, jaw set, eyes smouldering.

Norris paled. Then quickly he got control of himself, and his old bland smile returned.

"I expected you to blunder into Klæe's body one of these days," he said. "The explanation is quite simple. Klæe had been ill for many months, and he knew his time was up. His one desire in life was to go on this expedition with me, and he made me promise to bury him at the site of our new colony. The pact was between him and me, and I've followed it to the letter, telling noone."

Mason's lips curled in a sneer. "And just what makes you think we're going to believe that story?" he demanded.

Norris lit a cigar. "It's entirely immaterial to me whether you believe it or not."

But the story *was* believed, especially by the women, to whom

the romantic angle appealed. Mason's embryonic mutiny died without being born, and the *Marie Galante* sailed on through uncharted space toward her ninth and last landing.

As the days dragged by and no word came from the bridge cuddy, restlessness began amongst us. Rumor succeeded rumor, each story wilder and more incredible than the rest. Then just as the tension had mounted to fever pitch, there came the sickening lurch and grinding vibration of another landing.

Norris dispensed with his usual talk before marching out from the ship. After testing the atmosphere with the ozonometer, he passed out the heat pistols and distributed the various instruments for computing radioactivity and cosmic radiation.

"This is the planet, Nizar," he said shortly. "Largest in the field of the sun, Ponthis. You will make your survey as one group this time. I will remain here."

He stood watching us as we marched off down the cliff side. Then the blue *bensorr* trees rose up to swallow him from view. Mason swung along at the head of our column, eyes bright, a figure of aggressive action. We had gone but a hundred yards when it became apparent that as a planet Nizar was entirely different from its predecessors. There was considerable top soil, and here grew a tall reed-shaped plant that gave off varying chords of sound when the wind blew.

It was as if we were progressing through the nave of a mighty church with a muted organ in the distance. There was animal life too, a strange lizard-like bird that rose up in flocks ahead of us and flew screaming overhead.

"I don't exactly like it, Bagley" Mason said. "There's something unwholesome about this planet. The evolution is obviously in an early state of development, but I get the impression that it has gone backward; that the planet is really old and has reverted to its earlier life."

Above us the sky was heavily overcast, and a tenuous white

mist rising up from the *bensorr* trees formed curious shapes and designs. In the distance I could hear the swashing of waves on a beach.

Suddenly Mason stopped. "Look!" he said.

Below us stretched the shore of a great sea. But it was the structure rising up from the shore that drew a sharp exclamation from me. Shaped in a rough ellipse, yet mounted high toward a common point, was a large building of multiple hues and colors. The upper portion was eroded to crumbling ruins, the lower part studded with many bas-reliefs and triangular doorways.

"Let's go," Mason said, breaking out into a fast loping run.

The building was farther away than we had thought, but when we finally came up to it, we saw that it was even more of a ruin than it had at first appeared. It was only a shell with but two walls standing, alone and forlorn. Whatever race had lived here, they had come and gone.

We prowled about the ruins for more than an hour. The carvings on the walls were in the form of geometric designs and cabalistic symbols, giving no clue to the city's former occupants' identity.

And then Mason found the stairs leading to the lower crypts. He switched on his flash and led the way down cautiously. Level one . . . level two . . . three . . . we descended lower and lower. Here water from the nearby sea oozed in little rivulets that glittered in the light of the flash.

We emerged at length on a wide underground plaisance, a kind of amphitheater, with tier on tier of seats surrounding it and extending back into the shadows.

"Judging from what we've seen," Mason said, "I would say that the race that built this place had reached approximately a grade C-5 of civilization, according to the Mokart scale. This apparently was their council chamber."

"What are those rectangular stone blocks depending from the ceiling?" I said.

Mason turned the light beam upward. "I don't know," he said. "But my guess is that they are burial vaults. Perhaps the creatures were ornithoid."

Away from the flash the floor of the plaisance appeared to be a great mirror that caught our reflections and distorted them fantastically and horribly. We saw then that it was a form of living mold, composed of millions of tiny plants, each with an eye-like iris at its center. Those eyes seemed to be watching us, and as we strode forward, a great sigh rose up, as if in resentment at our intrusion.

There was a small triangular dais in the center of the chamber, and in the middle of it stood an irregular black object. As we drew nearer, I saw that it had been carved roughly in the shape of this central building and that it was in a perfect state of preservation.

Mason walked around this carving several times, examining it curiously.

"Odd," he said. "It looks to be an object of religious veneration, but I never heard before of a race worshipping a replica of its own living quarters."

Suddenly his voice died off. He bent closer to the black stone, studying it in the light of the powerful flash. He got a small magnifying glass out of his pocket and focused it on one of the miniature bas reliefs midway toward the top of the stone. Unfastening his geologic hammer from his belt, he managed, with a sharp, swinging blow, to break off a small protruding piece.

He drew in his breath sharply, and I saw his face go pale. I stared at him in alarm.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

He motioned that I follow and led the way silently past the others toward the stair shaft. Climbing to the top level was a

heart-pounding task, but Mason almost ran up those steps. At the surface he leaned against a pillar, his lips quivering spasmodically.

"Tell me I'm sane, Bagley," he said huskily. "Or rather, don't say anything until we've seen Norris. Come on. We've got to see Norris."

All the way back to the *Marie Galante*, I sought to soothe him, but he was a man possessed. He rushed up the ship's gangway, burst into central quarters and drew up before Navigator Norris like a runner stopping at the tape.

"You damned lying hypocrite!" he yelled.

Norris looked at him in his quiet way. "Take it easy, Mason," he said. "Sit down and explain yourself."

But Mason didn't sit down. He thrust his hand in his pocket, pulled out the piece of black stone he had chipped off the image in the cavern and handed it to Norris.

"Take a look at that!" he demanded.

Norris took the stone, glanced at it and laid it down on his desk. His face was emotionless. "I expected this sooner or later," he said. "Yes, it's *Indurate* all right. Is that what you want me to say?"

There was a dangerous fanatical glint in Mason's eyes now. With a sudden quick motion he pulled out his pistol.

"So you tricked us!" he snarled. "Why? I want to know why?"

I stepped forward and seized Mason's gun hand. "Don't be a fool," I said. "It can't be that important."

Mason threw back his head and burst into an hysterical peal of laughter. "Important!" he cried. "Tell him how important it is, Norris. *Tell him.*"

Quietly the Navigator filled and lighted his pipe. "I'm afraid Mason is right," he said. "I did trick you. Not purposely, however. And in the beginning I had no intention of telling anything

but the truth. Actually we're here because of a dead man's vengeance."

Norris took his pipe from his lips and stared at it absently.

"You'll remember that Ganeth-Klae, the Martian, and I worked together to invent *Indurate*. But whereas I was interested in the commercial aspects of that product, Klae was absorbed only in the experimental angle of it. He had some crazy idea that it should not be given to the general public at once but rather should be allocated for the first few years to a select group of scientific organizations. You see, *Indurate* was such a departure from all known materials that Ganeth-Klae feared it would be utilized for military purposes.

"I took him for a dreamer and a fool. Actually he was neither. How was I to know that his keen penetrating brain had seen through my motive to get control of all commercial marketing of *Indurate*. I had laid my plans carefully, and I had expected to reap a nice harvest. Klae must have been aware of my innermost thoughts, but Martian-like he said nothing."

Norris paused to wet his lips and lean against the desk. "I didn't kill Ganeth-Klae," he continued, "thought I suppose in a court of law I would be judged responsible for his death. The manufacture of *Indurate* required some ticklish work. As you know, we produced our halves of the formula separately. Physical contact with my half over a long period of time would prove fatal, I knew, and I simply neglected to so inform Ganeth-Klae.

"But his ultimate death was a boomerang. With Klae gone, I could find no trace of his half of the formula. I was almost beside myself for a time. Then I thought of something. Klae had once said that the secret of his half of the formula lay in himself. A vague statement, to say the least. But I took the words at their face value and gambled that he meant them literally; that is, that his body itself contained the formula.

"I tried everything: X-ray, chemical analysis of the skin. I even removed the cranial cap and examined the brain microscopically. All without result. Meanwhile the police were beginning to direct their suspicions toward me in the matter of Klæ's disappearance.

"You know the rest. It was necessary that I leave Earth at once and go beyond our system, beyond the jurisdiction of the planetary police. So I arranged this voyage with a sufficient complement of passengers to lessen the danger and hardship of a new life on a new world. I was still positive, however, that Klæ's secret lay in his dead body. I took that body along, encased in the Martian preservative, solidifex.

"It was my idea that I could continue my examination once we were safe on a strange planet. But I had reckoned without Ganeth-Klæ."

"What do you mean?" I said slowly.

"I said Klæ was no fool. But I didn't know that with Martian stoicism he suspected the worst and took his own ironic means of combating it. He used the last lot of *Indurate* to make that booster, a device which he said would increase our take-off speed. He mounted it on the *Marie Galante*.

"Mason, that device was no booster. It was a time machine, so devised as to catapult the ship not into outer space, but into the spacetime continuum. It was a mechanism designed to throw the *Marie Galante* forward into the future."

A cloud of fear began to well over me. "What do you mean?" I said again.

Navigator Norris paced around his desk "I mean that the *Marie Galante* had *not* once left Earth, has not in fact left the spot of its moorings but has merely gone forward in time. I mean that the nine "landings" we made were *not* stops on some other planets but halting stages of a journey into the future."

I had a bombshell burst over my head the effect could have been

no greater. Cold perspiration began to ooze out of my forehead. In a flash I saw the significance of the entire situation. That was why Norris had been so insistent that we always return to the ship before dark. He didn't want us to see the night sky and the constellations there for fear we would guess the truth. That was why he had never permitted any of us in the bridge cuddy and why he had kept all ports and observation shields closed.

"But the names of the planets . . . Coulora, Stragella, and the others and their positions on the chart . . . ?" I objected.

Norris smiled grimly. "All words created out of my imagination. Like the rest of you, I knew nothing of the true action of the booster. It was only gradually that truth dawned on me. But by the time we had made our first "landing" I had guessed. That was why I demanded we always take organic surveyor readings. I knew we had traveled far into future time, far beyond the life period of man on Earth. But I wasn't sure how far we had gone, and I lived with the hope that Klæ's booster might reverse itself and start carrying us backwards down the centuries."

For a long time I stood there in silence, a thousand mad speculations racing through my mind.

"How about that piece of *Indurate?*" I said at length. "It was chipped off an image in the ruins of a great building a mile or so from here."

"An image?" repeated Norris. A faint glow of interest slowly rose in his eyes. Then it died. "I don't know," he said. "It would seem to presuppose that the formula, both parts of it, was known by Klæ and that he left it for posterity to discover."

All this time Mason had been standing there, eyes smouldering, lips an ugly line. Now abruptly he took a step forward.

"I've wanted to return this for a long time," he said.

He doubled back his arm and brought his fist smashing onto

Norris' jaw. The Navigator's head snapped backward; he gave a low groan and slumped to the floor.

And that is where, by all logic, this tale should end. But, as you may have guessed, there is an anticlimax—what story-tellers call a happy conclusion.

Mason, Brandt, and I worked, and worked alone, on the theory that the secret of the *Indurate* formula would be the answer to our return down the time trail. We removed the body of Ganeth-Klae from its solidfex envelope and treated it with every chemical process we knew. By sheer luck the fortieth trial worked. A paste of carbo-genethon mixed with the crushed seeds of the Martian iron-flower was spread over Klae's chest and abdomen.

And there, in easily decipherable code, was not only the formula, but the working principles of the ship's booster—or rather, time-catapult. After that, it was a simple matter to reverse the principle and throw us backward in the time stream.

We are heading back as I write these lines. If they reach print and you read them, it will mean our escape was successful and that we returned to our proper slot in the epilogue of human events.

There remains, however, one matter to trouble me. Navigator Norris. I like the man. I like him tremendously, in spite of his cold-blooded confession, and past record. He must be punished, of course. But I, for one, would hate to see him given the death penalty. It is a serious problem.

The Historian

It was the year 12,000 according to the System's calendar and Lak Dhrow sat at his desk in the royal library, writing. Outside spring had come once again to Mars; the canal trees were in bloom, and the air was filled with sweet scents and sounds. But Lak Dhrow continued with his work unheeding.

His labor of thirty years was nearing completion. A few more details to add in the pre-space Earth period, a few more touches to the introduction and he could write finis to his history of the Solar System. It had been a herculean undertaking. Even now, though he alone had written and stylized every one of its millions of words and designed and charted each of its thousands of graphs and figures he could remember little beyond the chapter on Venus.

A chime sounded at the door, and the Oligarch entered, a tall patrician with youthful eyes and a brisk step. There was a look of anticipation on his face.

"Lak Dhrow," said the Oligarch, "I have heard your work is done."

The historian nodded and smiled. "I had hoped to surprise you," he said. "Yes, it is all but finished. Twelve thousand years of the activities of intelligent life in the Solar System from the first papyrus of the Martian red desert to this month's develop-

ment of the light-year probascope. Everything has been recorded."

The Oligarch wet his lips. "May I see it?" he said.

For answer Lak Dhrow touched a stud. A light flashed and an under-sized Venusian entered the room. He seemed to understand what was wanted of him at once. Together the two rolled a huge screen forward and removed its protective cover. The Oligarch took his position in a gilded settee.

"You must remember there are still some rough passages," Lak Dhrow said. "There are also one or two years of pre-space Earth that are still somewhat dark. To be exact, the period around the middle of the twentieth century. Ho Garth has declared that it was the time of first stage atomics, but then Ho Garth is notoriously unreliable. This period . . ."

"No excuses," said the Oligarch, not unkindly. "Turn on the screen."

So for the next hour they sat watching the moving panorama of the past. The screen was three dimensional. In the foreground slowly unrolled the explanatory script, carefully styled in Upper Cast Martian. Back of this were animated three-dimensional drawings in color, illustrating in authenticated costume, highlights of events described in the script. And finally, all of this was set against a background of maps and astronomical charts that were as perfect as the Martian Academy of Cosmography could make them.

They saw the first development of animal life on Pluto, the result of light transporting seed across space. Pre-space-travel history flowed by rapidly in a confusing array of tribal and national conflicts, wars and rebellions. They saw a likeness of the ill-fated *Colossus*, the first ship to reach Mars from Earth, and a reenactment of the Battle of the Canals. They saw Igor's legendary Death Brigade as it raced down Canal Grande, and the rise and fall of city-state Mars, feudal Venus, communal Io and Ganymede. Men

and women crowded upon each other: Empress Carzia, "the man who made a satellite," "the Brotherhood of Space," Immortal Juxton Kabe who was finally destroyed in 4012, the first and second Councils of Nine, the Plutonian Wars. Life and developments, major and minor, the record of twelve thousand years of life in the Solar System, ending with the present outergalactic expedition—which as yet was only in the formulative stage. The historical screen was a tremendous accomplishment for one man.

When he had finally seen enough, the Oligarch signaled that it be turned off and leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Lak Dhrow," he said, "you have done well. This history will be a lasting memorial for our people and our age. I—"

His words were interrupted as the doors slid back and two attaches entered. Before each of them rolled an auto-cart piled high with documents.

"What is it?" demanded Lak Dhrow, annoyed at this interruption.

"The Director's compliments," one of the attaches said. "These documents were sent over by *Research*. The Director said they were middle-twentieth century Earthian, discovered only last week in the northwestern hemisphere. They were found in a sealed tomb along with various other artifacts and may reveal a great deal heretofore unknown about the period."

Lak Dhrow nodded.

"Put them there," he said, indicating a smaller alcove to the side. "I will inspect them later."

But Lak Dhrow had no opportunity to do more work on the historical screen. Exactly six days after his interview with the Oligarch, the historian went completely mad. So sudden and so all-encompassing was his madness that the Oligarch delayed for some time calling in the court psychiatrists. Eventually he re-

ceived his report, but that report proved to be a series of contradictions. The Oligarch tore it up and sent for Lafcardio, the greatest authority on mental diseases on Mars.

That was on Greenday, the sixth of Canalber, according to the Martian calendar. For a week Lafcardio continued his consultations and finally quitted Lak Dhrow's chambers to report sadly that the historian's case was hopeless.

"But have you determined the cause of his madness?" asked the Oligarch. "Have you utilized the electro-hypnotic machine and the psychograph? Have you?"

"I have tried everything," replied Lafcardio, "and it is my opinion that it was the last collection of documents from Earth which was the sole cause of his derangement. Up to the time of their reception, his work of thirty years was a complete and well-ordered thing in which he could take pride of accomplishment. But those documents changed all that. They undermined everything he had done, cast doubts on all his efforts of the past. All the facts he had collected and organized for his history, dates of inventions, names of planetary places and cities, events of the past, types of space ships—everything, which he had recorded—and especially the allocation of those details to their proper historical period, were wrong—entirely wrong!"

The Oligarch leaned back to frown reflectively.

"And these documents?" he said. "What are they?"

Lafcardio consulted a notebook. "They were of a peculiar type made in twentieth-century Earth with bright colored covers. They were known as magazines . . . *science-fiction magazines*."

Lodana

If I hadn't known otherwise, I would have said that back in the Twentieth Century the forefathers of Jimmy Dumont must have operated a mail-order business. Either that, or he had a postal-rocket for a godmother. His one interest in life seemed to be the purchase of goods by remote control.

Of course I'll admit that out here on the Sixth Moon of Jupiter the arrival of the monthly mail ship is an event of great importance. We count the days until the ship arrives, and then for the next five or six hours we curse the whim that led us to sign up for a three-year hitch with Sounds, Ltd.

There were five of us at BeTaba, five Earth men surrounded by some pretty alien landscape and by a couple of hundred treacherous Mutants. The former accounts no doubt for the "96 or better" psychiatric test requirement, and the latter, for the cumulative salary bonus which the company paid us if we stuck the full three years.

Jimmy Dumont definitely was a square peg in a round hole. What he didn't know about the duties of a Sounds, Ltd. man was colossal, and he didn't seem to care either.

"Mining sound!" he would say with a sneer. "It's a crazy business, crazier than those wafer-headed Mutants."

It *was* too, although the Philosopher called it distinctive.

Twenty years ago some ambitious explorer had discovered the BeTaba caverns. They weren't so much as caverns go; they contained little or no artifacts, and only the hieroglyphics on the walls convinced him that they were the home of the lost Upper Caste Sixtian race.

Then a year later someone happened to examine the blue crystals in the cavern's dome. And that was the beginning of Sounds, Ltd., and the forthcoming trouble.

Those crystals were sixty per cent pure *paxite* and forty per cent pure *carponium*. During the time the caverns had been occupied they had been in a state of flux. Now they contained a complete "frozen" record of all sounds ever made in those caverns.

Layer by layer, strata by strata, they had captured for posterity the speeches, the music, the revels, the chance conversations of that lost race. All that was necessary to release the sounds was to subject the crystals to mechanical tension and the simultaneous amplification of two Haranta tubes, one revolving clockwise, the other counter clockwise.

At first, before any mining restrictions were made by the Government, the crystals were chipped out at random, thus spoiling any continuity to the sounds that might have been discovered.

The fad of BeTaba crystals is an old story now. Every bourgeois house on Mars, Venus and Earth had one or more of them inset in the walls for use as doorbells, and so on.

During those zany days Sounds Ltd. was a pretty prosperous concern. But today, although the mining of the crystals goes on, the market has been restricted to the demands of libraries, historical societies, and research organizations. Furthermore, we cut the crystals according to an outlined chart now, except in the more remote caverns, and much of the thrill of discovery has gone.

That is, I thought it had gone. Until the trouble that started with Jimmy Dumont.

Jimmy seemed to worship that monthly mail ship. Now Jupiter's Sixth Moon isn't exactly a frontier. There are three good-sized cities—Trolontis, Parcea, and New Chicago. But there was a magnetic band between the BeTaba caverns and the cities which made navigation extremely difficult. If the ship had come every week instead of once a month, my guess is that Jimmy would have blown his top completely.

Sending for stuff by mail! That was the Kid's hobby. He dispatched letters ordering free samples of shaving cream, razor blades, fancy cigarette lighters. He ordered new fangled vises, chemical outfits, and a thousand and one other things. His quarters were piled high with the stuff, in addition to mountains of catalogues and magazine advertising sections.

Psychologically speaking, of course, in most cases he didn't care a rap for the stuff he got. It was just a hangover from childhood, the anticipation of things yet to come. At first I was pretty tough on him. I said some pointed things about "growing up" until the Philosopher drew me aside one day.

"Go easy on him, Kendrick," he said. "You see he hasn't anyone to write letters to him."

The Philosopher was Stewart. He was a quiet bookish fellow, tall and lean, with a high forehead. Besides him, the Kid, and myself, there was Holmes, the officer in charge, and Fleming. It was our job to see that the Mutants cut the crystals according to plan and didn't run amok and kill us or themselves.

The first of September brought the monthly mail ship and the initial seed to our trouble. I got the first hint of the latter when the Kid burst through the airlock into our cuddy. His space suit was half open and there was a wild gleam in his eyes.

"It's come!" he said. "Cost me a month's salary, but it's worth it. Take a look at that!"

He placed a half-open packing case on the table. Inside I could see a small plastic box, topped with a turn-table, an elliptic coil and what looked like an oversized Micro-Wellman tube. "What is it?" I said.

"Can't you see?" the Kid said. "It's a supersonic receiver, guaranteed to pick up and amplify vibrations up to thirty thousand cycles."

"I see," I said sarcastically. "And just what are you going to do with this piece of apparatus?"

Dumont gave me a withering look. "Why, I'm going to test the BeTab crystals, that's what I'm going to do."

And that was the queer thing about the whole affair. Here BeTab crystals had been known, heard, and sold for almost twenty years, and it had never occurred to anyone that all of the sounds imprisoned in them might not be audible to the ear.

Of course there was no good reason why the crystals should hold high frequency vibrations. The race that had lived in the caverns supposedly had reached only a Grade-C-5 state of civilization according to the Mokart scale. Those old-timers had known how to throw a banquet or a festival, all unaware that every word they uttered was being made immortal in the perfectly acusticized dome above them, but they hadn't known anything about the modern concept of sound waves.

But that didn't bother the Kid a bit. He set up a small laboratory in his room, and every time the Mutants brought a car of crystals up out of mine, he took a number of samples and proceeded to test them for supersonic vibrations.

"You see," he said, "we really don't know what might be hidden in those crystals. We've only scratched the surface."

On the night of the fifteenth of September the five of us were in Central Quarters in the cuddy. The Philosopher was reading Londow's "Perfection of Races." Holmes was going over his reports. And Fleming and I were playing a game of Martian rummy.

The Kid had moved his sonic receiver out from his room and was busy putting little segments of crystals on the slowly revolving turn-table. He wasn't using the headphones now but had his ear close to a parabolic horn which emitted no sound except an intermittent hissing.

Suddenly, however, the silence was broken. A voice sounded in the room, issuing from the horn. A woman's voice it was, soft and throaty as the vibration cycles were reduced by the receiver, and filled with lure and enchantment.

Stewart's book slipped from his hands. He stared at the Kid's apparatus with speculative, bewildered eyes. Holmes, the officer-in-charge, half rose from his chair.

The magic voice continued, not singing, not talking, but crooning a sort of spoken lullaby. The words seemed to be no part of a known language, but rather a combination of vowels and consonants arranged in a strange and euphonious way.

And this was the horror of it! As the honeyed voice sounded, you got the impression that it was eating into your very brain!

On and on the voice continued. And then suddenly it stopped.

Stewart, the Philosopher, crossed to the Kid's side and stared down at the bit of crystal on the turn-table.

"Did that voice come from that crystal?" he demanded.

Jimmy Dumont nodded.

"From a supersonic register?"

"Yes." The Kid glanced at a dial. "From eighty thousand cycles. I stepped the receiver up."

Stewart picked up the crystal and turned it over and over in his hands.

"Where did this sample come from?"

"From the uncharted caverns at the far end of Tunnel Six. I was down there yesterday and found it on the floor. I guess it had fallen from the ceiling."

Stewart replaced the crystal on the turn-table and started it revolving again.

The second sounding of that voice carried a thousand mental reverberations that seemed to repeat themselves over and over in the brain. Hypnotic, an unseen Lorelei, it robbed the will, rendered the body powerless to act. I felt as if I could listen to it forever.

With an effort Stewart switched off the receiver and faced us.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I think Jimmy has found something! I think he's found the living proof of the one-time existence of Lodana!"

Now I'm quite aware that the word "Lodana" may mean nothing to you. But mention it to any Colonial on this Sixth Moon of Jupiter, and he'll give you a quick look and glance over his shoulder to see if you were overheard.

Lodana was the religion of the Mutants, a devil worship, a fetish to a legendary Lilith who was said to have once ruled over the lost race of the caverns. The most stringent restrictions on the part of the Colonials had failed to suppress it. Here at BeTaba we tolerated the noon-day quarter-hour of supplication and the various hysterical "seizures" that came over one or more of the Mutants during working time.

The Mutants themselves were a queer offshoot of the normal Sixtian race, a wafer-headed undersized group of creatures, low in the intelligence scale. For the first twenty-five years of their

lives their physical strength was prodigious, but after that they rapidly declined until death came at thirty or even earlier.

But now Stewart had said Lodana was an actuality. We had heard her voice. Did the Mutants have the ability to hear sounds from a supersonic register without the aid of receiving apparatus? And, if so, did that feminine voice have the same effect on them that it did on us?

One thing was certain. If the Mutants became aware of the existence of this particular crystal, there would be the devil to pay. They were fanatical enough over their religion now.

Stewart took action at once. He closed off the remote caverns of Tunnel Six to the Mutant laborers. He ordered Jimmy Dumont to test samples of all shipments that left the mine. And he caught the next mail ship for Trolontis to report the discovery to Company headquarters.

While he was gone, the Kid continued to explore Tunnel Six. With the aid of Fleming and myself he slung a catwalk across a narrower part of the tunnel dome. But he found no more "voice" crystals, and it was easy to see he was losing interest in his latest hobby.

Stewart returned in good spirits. He brought me a box of Venusian cheroots, the Kid a novelty house catalogue, and all of us some good news. The Sixtian Government had finally recognized the incapacity of the Mutants during the latter part of their tragically short lives and had voted them an assistance benefit, to be paid after the age of twenty-five, or, on their death, to their heirs.

It meant that the Mutants would finally be appeased. It meant that the greatest part of our "native trouble" at the mine was over.

That's what we thought! What we didn't realize was that at this very moment we were sitting on a powder keg with a short fuse.

The new catalogue which Stewart had brought started the Kid off again. In its pages he found the advertisement for what was called a "fortune finder," and at once he proceeded to borrow the necessary money from Fleming and me and send for it.

Meanwhile Stewart made no further mention of the voice in the crystal. Apparently satisfied that the assistance benefit was an answer to all of our troubles at the mine, he buried himself deeper in his books. And that was odd, because ordinarily he was the sort who wouldn't pass up a chance for a scientific explanation to a puzzle like this.

Instead, he read Bellair's "The Problem of the Misfits," Connell's "Perfection: A State of Being," and even that much criticized Martian work, Hom Vala's "The Utopian Race."

It was Fleming who put it into words.

"Things are too blame quiet here," he said. "There hasn't been a Mutant revolt in a month, and for a week now none of the devils has tried to kill me."

The mail ship brought the Kid's "fortune finder." A simple device, it consisted of a falex coil in the end of a long metal staff, the bottom of which was fitted with a hypersensitive ardiium cap. About the only thing it could do was indicate deposits of metal beneath the surface. The enclosed direction-sheet stated that it would reveal without fail any hidden cache to a depth of twelve feet.

Jimmy Dumont lugged the thing down into Tunnel Six. Hours passed, and he didn't come back. When we didn't hear any word of him by eight o'clock, Holmes sent Fleming down to see what had happened to him. But Fleming didn't return either.

From here on I hope I may be pardoned for any lapse in the continuity of this narrative. Things happened fast and horribly.

We found Jimmy Dumont and Fleming lying side by side at

the farther reaches of Tunnel Six. A first glance at the widening pool of blood and the long hooked knife lying in the center of it sent a wave of horror through me. A Mutant had ripped open Fleming's space suit, and he had died almost instantly. Miraculously, the Kid had escaped death by shutting off the upper compartment of his suit after it, too, had been pierced. But there was an ugly stab wound in his thigh.

The thing that made us stand and stare, however, was the yawning hole at the Kid's feet. He must have been digging for hours after his "fortune finder" had indicated a "find." Approximately six feet beneath the surface was revealed the upper half of a roofless shrine containing an upraised dais, an image, and a supplication platform. And unmistakably it was pure Upper Caste Sixtian work, a shrine of that lost race.

Even the stark tragedy of Fleming's death was offset for a moment by the significance of this discovery. For, as Stewart said, the image was the image of Lodana.

There was a tenseness and anticipation and depression that night in Central Quarters. We had little difficulty in piecing together the details of the tragedy. The Mutants had disobeyed orders and gone into Tunnel Six. There they had surprised the Kid and Fleming in the act of clearing away the buried shrine. And, aroused by what they deemed defilement of their fetish, they had sought to murder the two Sounds, Ltd. men.

"There's no telling what will happen now," Stewart said. "The teachings of Lodana, you know, are that the future life is a more glorious one than the present, that one should not hesitate for an instant to end this existence, should the reason present itself. If we aren't careful, news of this will spread to the cities—to Trolontis, Parcea, and New Chicago." He closed his eyes

wearily. "Philosophically speaking," he said, "it's too bad this mine isn't located on Io or Ganymede."

Holmes looked across at him. "What do you mean?"

"There are no mutants on those moons," Stewart replied. "There the races are pure."

We buried Fleming next day. We posted double guards on the Mutants. We electrically wired their barracks so that they could be stunned into inactivity on a moment's notice. But when it came to closing off Tunnel Six, Stewart argued against it.

"I say clear away the shrine and let the Mutant laborers visit it whenever they want to," he said. "When they see we're making no move to interfere with their religion, I think all trouble will stop."

Holmes finally agreed. Then we all went down into Tunnel Six to take another look at the image.

The electric lift took us down five levels. The four of us got into a tractor car and a moment later were speeding over a floor as smooth as a pavement. The place was an enormous labyrinth. Subsidiary tunnels and caverns branched everywhere in a hopeless maze.

High above by the blue crystal dome great flocks of Ularless—*pseidemactata*—circled endlessly, their weazened human-like faces peering down at us in open resentment at our intrusion. It has always been a matter of wonder to me how these creatures can exist in these caverns with only the scant mosses for subsistence.

Stretching a hundred feet down the central cavern was the fossil of a Penthisaur, the twin-head slug of this Sixth Moon's Upper Mezozoic.

But it was the walls of the cavern that held one's gaze. Pro-

truding from their surfaces were hundreds of optic stones, half-organic, half-inorganic "growths" that were like human eyes mounted on three-inch stems. The lavender pupils of those eyes watched us as we passed, and the stems nodded and rustled a strange whispering.

We came at length to Jimmy Dumont's shrine. The entire structure was scarcely more than ten feet across, but the image of Lodana was life-size—a woman clad in a loose-flowing robe with her hair streaming down her back. And it was at once beautiful and horrible.

Stewart was already giving voice to his plan.

"We can rope off all but this section of the cavern," he said. "We can let a few of the Mutants in at a time and see how they react to it."

Holmes nodded. All of us, I think, felt something there. It was a feeling akin to the one we had experienced when we first heard the woman's voice released from the crystal. As if some alien entity were struggling to enter and devour our minds.

The first group of Mutants was permitted to enter Tunnel Six and visit the shrine the next day. Curiously, there was no disorder. The Mutants' eyes grew large as they sighted the image. They immediately threw themselves down in supplication and mumbled their queer incantations.

The following day another group entered the cavern. And thus the daily pilgrimage became a ritual to be watched and endured. But the quiet was a false one. A weird tenseness hung like a pall over the mine.

Meanwhile the monthly mail ship, our only means of communication with the rest of the planet, was overdue. Day after day passed without a sign of it. But when it came, it brought a bomb-shell!

All over this Sixth Moon, Mutants were committing suicide

on a mass scale. Seventy had been found in Trolontis. A hundred more were dead in Parcea. So far, the death plague had missed New Chicago, but Colonial officials there reported the native quarter in a state of great unrest.

Holmes swore when he heard this news. "I told you we should have destroyed that shrine," he said. "Those devils won't be content with killing themselves off soon. They'll turn on the Earth-men next."

Stewart shook his head. "It must be only coincidence," he said. "There's been no communication between the cities and the mine. And only the Mutant laborers here know of the existence of the shrine."

For answer Holmes walked over to a cabinet and took down a fulmination rod. He threw its switch, set its little dial and handed it to Stewart.

"I want that shrine destroyed, and I want it destroyed immediately," he said. "Take this down to Tunnel Six and see that it's discharged."

After Stewart had gone, Holmes, the Kid, and I sat in Central Quarters, each trying to appear at ease. Only Jimmy succeeded. He was fiddling with a special non-magnetic visi set which the mail ship had brought him. And suddenly as we sat there he got the thing to working.

It didn't occur to me for a minute or two that he was doing something which no Company man had been able to do yet—pick up broadcasts from the cities from this side of the magnetic band. There was no image on the screen, but the announcer's voice sounded clearly:

"--continuing with our noon-day report from Trolontis. For more than twelve hours there have been no further suicides reported among the Mutant population of this city. However, all streets of the Mutant quarter were deserted today, and it was

understood a mass meeting is being held in their underground galleries."

The Kid turned a dial, and the voice faded. From his place in the opposite chair Holmes was watching him quietly, a rising gleam of interest in his eyes. Came the singing whine of the magnetic band hum, and then another announcer's voice sounded, speaking fast and excitedly.

"This is Parcea, sending a general emergency call. Mutants here are in an open state of revolt. Sixteen Colonial officials have been murdered this morning, and at this moment a mob five hundred strong is advancing on Government House."

Holmes lurched to his feet. "Where is that cursed Stewart?" he growled. "He should be back by now and—" Hand on the latch bar of the air-lock, he suddenly stiffened. "It's locked," he said slowly. "From the outside."

Together we exerted all our strength on the mechanism, but it was useless. The air-lock was equipped with an emergency latch bar on the outside of the cuddy, but it was hidden in a secret niche, and no Mutant could possibly have found it. Or could they?

And then as we stood there, we heard it. Soft and far away at first, but steadily growing louder and clearer, a woman's voice sounded through the narrow confines of Central Quarters. It was a voice soft and enticing. Lodana!

The honeyed sound vibrated against our ears, reverberated back and forth across the room in a thousand echoes. Holmes clapped his hands to his head and fell to the floor. Even as he did, I felt that voice enter my brain like a bulbous thing alive, writhe and twist its way deeper with the relentless power of an auger.

Jimmy Dumont swung about frantically.

"The refuse tube!" he cried. "I may be able to squeeze through it."

Somehow we stumbled to the galley. The voice of madness fol-

loved us, seemed to be even louder in this small chamber where our food was prepared. I looked at the refuse tube in despair. It didn't seem possible a man could force his body through so small an opening. But the Kid started working frantically to remove the inner grate. As he struggled, the room seemed to swirl about me. Spots and queer colored lights formed in my vision.

Then there was the sudden *plop* as the hermetic cover banged into place. Jimmy Dumont was gone.

An instant later the Kid opened the air-lock door, and Holmes and I stumbled outside. Away from that hideous sound we quickly revived.

Without a word the three of us now made for Tunnel Six as one man. Holmes had a pistol in his hand, and the Kid had picked up a flat piece of rock. I think each of us knew our quarry now, but the real truth was filtering into us slowly.

The descent down the lift to the lower level seemed endless. Then we were pacing three abreast down the floor of the cavern. No tractor car was in sight.

The shrine with its life-size image of Lodana came into sight, but there was no sign of anyone near it. We crossed the intervening space warily, Holmes slightly in the lead. Then when we were ten feet away a voice suddenly broke the silence.

"Stop!"

Stewart, the Philosopher, stood there, one arm upraised over his head, poised the fulmination rod. There was a mad glitter in the man's eyes. His face was flushed, his hair clawed in wild array.

"Stop," he said again. "This is as far as you go. If you move a step farther, I throw this rod, and I think you know what that means. Holmes, I see you've guessed the truth, but in your usual clumsy way, probably only half the truth."

"You're mad!" Holmes said.

Stewart shrugged. "Perhaps. Madness is only a relative state. The important thing right now is that a new group of Mutants will be entering the cavern in a few minutes. Not our Mutant laborers, Holmes. I dismissed them weeks ago after I discovered an old lost trail across the magnetic band. Each day you saw Mutants visit the shrine. Those Mutants were from Parcea, Trolontis, New Chicago, the cities to which they could return and spread the news of the latest developments of their religion.

"Perhaps you're not completely acquainted with the teachings of Lodana. It is an admirable philosophy, Holmes. Lodana teaches self-destruction, and with the Mutants destroyed, the Sixtian race here on this moon could be a pure one. I'm a perfectionist, and a perfectionist can't stand degeneracy."

To the rear a sudden muttering began to fill the cavern. A crowd of a hundred or more Mutant laborers was advancing slowly on the image.

Exactly what happened after that I cannot be sure. At my side the Kid suddenly took aim and let fly the flat rock he had been holding. The missile struck Stewart on the wrist. He gave a cry of pain, and the fulmination rod clattered to the floor. In an instant he had dived to regain it, but Holmes pumped out two shots from his pistol.

Twin blazing white lances of fire struck with a double roar, missing Stewart by inches. He was up again like a released spring, running for the rear of the cavern. The Kid was about to rush forward, but Holmes yanked him back.

"Look out! The rod!"

A roar of a thousand thunders trembled the walls of the cavern. A cloud of smoke, dust, and debris billowed upward, blanketing the scene, and a sheet of greenish fire shot outward like a clutching hand.

When it had cleared, we saw what had happened. Of the shrine

and the image of Lodana there was no sign. Fragments of metal and masonry were scattered over a wide area. Farther back, where the fulmination rod had spent the greater part of its explosive force, lay Stewart. His right arm was still extended as if he were in the act of reaching out for something. He was dead . . .

A long time later Holmes lit his pipe in Central Quarters in the cuddy and attempted to explain.

"There's still a lot I don't understand," he said slowly. "The workings of the human brain are difficult to explain, and when a man like Stewart is involved, you can't always put everything into its proper slot like a picture puzzle.

"Stewart called himself a perfectionist. He would have liked to have had us believe that he instituted that wave of mass suicides among the Mutants because he wanted a pure race here on this moon. In reality he was an egoist and an opportunist. He saw at once what the rest of us did not see—that the lost race of the caverns had been much more advanced than we had originally thought. They had provided for the elimination of the Mutants—which must have been a problem even then—by preserving the voice of their fetish in a supersonic register at a very high pitch.

"Now it is well-known that super or ultrasonic vibrations under certain conditions have a harmful effect on the human organisms. Vibrations of a sufficiently high cycle rate will disintegrate the marrow of the bones and will injure the brain. The Mutants, however, had hypersensitive auditory nerves. In their ears the sound of the voice of Lodana had a strange effect. It produced a powerful sense of depression climaxed by a desire to destroy themselves.

"You will remember that the Government recently voted the Mutants an assistance benefit. Immediately after Jimmy discovered

the voice in the crystal Stewart went to Trolontis, ostensibly to report the discovery to Company headquarters. Instead, he made arrangements with the Mutant leaders there to take over some of those assistance benefit policies in return for the promise to let them hear Lodana's voice.

"Previously he had discovered a lost trail across the magnetic band. He secretly dismissed the Mutant laborers here at the mine, bringing in another group from the cities to take their places. He repeated this exchange every few days so that a constant stream of Mutant fanatics, inflamed by the voice of Lodana, could filter back into the cities and thus spread the doctrine of mass suicide.

"The shrine, of course, was the crux of the situation. Stewart knew from his readings that such an object must exist somewhere in the caverns, and he provided the Kid with a means of discovering it by urging him to send for the fortune finder. As you now know, that shrine contained crude but effective apparatus to broadcast the high frequency vibrations which were molded into the voice of Lodana.

"I see," I said. "Then Stewart's real motive was the assistance benefits. Every time a new group visited the shrine, he played on their superstitious fervor and induced them to sign those payable-on-death benefits over to him. But why—"

"Why did they do it?" Holmes puffed his pipe in silence a moment. "Probably because he told them they would receive Lodana's favor for the trip to the next world. Thank heavens, we were able to send a report of the image's destruction back to the cities on the Kid's visi set. That should stop the rebellion and the wave of suicides."

The Lorenzo Watch

It was a curious fact that Martin Hatworth, though afflicted with a bad case of myopia, necessitating thick-lensed spectacles, was nevertheless singularly adept at finding things other persons had lost. Throughout the village of Farn's Landing he was forever being called upon by residents, young and old, to retrieve articles that had strayed from their owners.

The Farn's Landing *Sentinel* had in its file of back issues several accounts of Hatworth's peculiar prowess in this field. There was the time in 1933 when the Marshal had dropped somewhere a costly diamond brooch, placed in his keeping by a tourist's wife who had decided to accompany her husband fishing. Hatworth, without asking questions, had gone straight to the stile of a nearby pasture, groped a moment in the weeds under the bottom board, and discovered it. Asked why he had gone there, where even the Marshal had forgotten he had been, Hatworth had only smiled quietly and replied:

"I got a knack for this sort of thing, that's all."

But knack or otherwise, it was an unprofitable avocation, frequently in fact expensive, taking time away from his work at the grist mill on the edge of town. Moreover, his wife, a nagging woman at best, was continually upbraiding him for what she called his unappreciated efforts.

Nineteen forty-nine had been a good year of discovery for Hatworth. He had found no less than twenty-seven dollars in cash, five dollars of which he was able to keep for himself as unclaimed, two sets of ignition keys for non-residents' cars, a .30-.30 rifle, Old Man Barne's "folding camera" and a pair of copper-tipped oars. But it was in 1958 that he discovered how to realize a profit on his strange ability.

In that year Farn's Landing had a total of four accidental drownings, and in spite of extra guards put on at the bathing beach and warnings given to all fishermen, the succeeding years saw a mounting toll of water deaths. Of course, Farn's Landing was primarily a resort town, and such tragedies were to be expected. But in each case there was considerable difficulty in locating the body. More and more it was realized that Cannon Lake, with its upper and lower bays, its many islands and channels, was as dangerous a labyrinth as it was beautiful.

Hatworth's plan was simple. He would recover those bodies and do so in a way that would play upon the superstitious beliefs of the year-around townsfolk. Himself a confirmed skeptic, a large raw-boned man in his middle fifties, he formulated the advance details carefully. First he saw to it that his finding abilities were advertised to every settlement on the lake. Next he caused it to be bruited about that those abilities were the result of occult methods upon which he had put a considerable amount of study. To his work at the grist mill he frequently carried a book on spectral manifestations, and he kept a shelf of equally impressive volumes in a prominent place in his home, all to the outspoken disgust of his wife.

When the spring of the year came around and with it the first drowning of the season, Hatworth waited impatiently during long days of dragging the lake, and when all attempts to find the body had failed, quietly offered his services. Not for nothing had he

lived his entire life in Farn's Landing. He was aware of one fact that so far had escaped the other townsfolk: that there was a central underwater current running obliquely through both arms of the lake and that sooner or later any heavy object would be drawn into that current and so would be carried along to Blackwell Marsh on the south shore. Blackwell Marsh was seldom visited, even by those in search of drowning victims. There was something oppressive about its tangled rip grass, its dark cattails nodding sullenly in the wind, and its constant chorus of frogs.

The first time Hatworth was called upon, he had acted a little too impulsively. He had rowed once around Crane Island, waited until dusk, and then headed directly for Blackwell Marsh. In the course of an hour, aided by a powerful flashlight, he had discovered the body, that of a boy of twelve who had wandered from his companions while swimming in deep water. Hatworth had removed all tell-tale reeds and rip grass and returned to Farn's Landing, there to claim the hundred dollar reward which had been posted.

There were commendations of his work and a few under-the-breath remarks that he had joined with the devil in accomplishing it. But these, he realized, were not enough.

On the next occasion when a young woman was the victim, he paid more attention to stage setting. He dressed all in black and demanded that the immediate shores of the lake be vacated for an hour after he had begun his activities. Earlier in the afternoon he had cast upon the water six loaves of bread, after first digging a hollow in each loaf and depositing a drop of quicksilver therein. These loaves, he carefully explained, would converge on the spot where the body lay. Then with a red lantern on the thwart of the rowboat and the oarlocks heavily muffled with strips of black cloth, he pushed out on the dark water.

Drownings at Cannon Lake continued to mount at an alarming

rate, and Hatworth, gradually increasing the fee for his services, profited nicely. He found himself scanning the western sky each morning in anticipation for a possible storm, and then counting the fishing boats that were visible out on the bay.

The money he received from this employment gave him a glow of satisfaction as he watched it slowly grow. Nevertheless, personal finances began to play a more and more disagreeable part in his life. His wife constantly bemoaned the fact that their house was in need of repair, that her clothes were shabby and that her table held only the plainest of food.

"Found the Altmere woman's body today," Hatworth said unemotionally, seating himself for the evening meal. "Took me four hours."

Martha Hatworth brushed a strand of iron gray hair from her eyes and voiced a single question:

"How much?"

"Two hundred dollars," Hatworth replied uncasily.

"Humph. Well, it'll pay the taxes and my dentist's bill, if not much more."

This incessant talk of money would not have irritated Hatworth so much if he had not known that his wife had a tidy sum of her own.

When her father, a jewel merchant, had died recently, she had inherited considerable money, together with some bonds and a fine Lorenzo watch. The watch was a rare one. It had twelve large-sized diamonds in the back of the hunting case and a beautiful emerald mounted in the center, and Hatworth had coveted it from the first moment he had seen it.

But Martha had ideas of her own. "These things are mine," she said, "and you keep your hands off. It's your duty as a husband to support me."

True to her word, she had even kept from Hatworth the

amount of her inheritance. Only the watch did she display openly with a flaunting deliberateness aimed apparently at goading her husband into jealousy.

Each night before retiring, she carefully removed it from the chain about her neck, wound it slowly and wiped it with a polishing cloth. After that she opened the back of the case and did something to the movement with a tiny screwdriver, apparently following the training passed on to her by her father. Then she pushed in the stem and let its little fairy bells announce in consecutive chimes the hour and the minutes after the hour. She replaced the watch on the chain around her neck, a mute warning to Hatworth that she did not trust him.

Once and only once had Hatworth been able to get close enough to see the watch in detail. Ornately carved, it was equipped with five dials: the usual hour, minute, and second hands, and little square readings for the day of the week, the month, and the year. The face was an intricate mosaic of engraving; in the top right corner a tiny skull was in evidence; at the bottom was some inscription in what seemed to be Latin but so minute as to be illegible. The hands themselves were flesh-colored and were fashioned to resemble human feminine hands.

But it was the jewels that attracted Hatworth, and one way or another, he intended to have them.

The summer passed, however, and he had other things to occupy his mind. By the first of September, Farn's Landing had recorded no less than seven drownings, in each of which tragedies Hatworth had recovered the body. On September 2nd the town was in an uproar again. Sixteen-year-old Cynthia Dobson had taken out her canoe alone and had not returned. A search party was organized and took off in a power launch as soon as the news became known. They found the canoe floating bottomside up near Crane Island but no sign of the girl.

Hatworth was sitting on the wharf, placidly smoking his pipe when the search party returned.

"Looks like another job for you," Jeb Howatt said, shaking his head. "This damned lake is a devil lake, if you ask me."

Three hours after his initial theatricals had been completed, Hatworth returned with a silent object covered with sail cloth in his rowboat. He also returned with something else—a plan.

All the way home that night he mulled over it, and by morning the details were complete in his mind. He did his work at the grist mill badly during the ensuing day, counting the hours until it was time for him to go home. When at last he was ready to leave, he slipped a crowbar under his arm and headed down the East road.

A quarter of a mile from town, he turned into an almost overgrown side-road which led to his house through a grove of second-growth poplar. Presently he came upon the wooden bridge that crossed the deep-flowing Talberry Creek.

There he fell to work. He pried loose three center planks of the bridge, breaking off bits of their rotting ends and arranging them so that they would swing downward when weight was put on either side of the middle beam. Then he carefully kicked dirt over the boards, hiding all traces of his work.

Back home, he said to his wife, "Have you seen old Mrs. Bentley lately? Jeb Howatt told me today she was asking about you. She's pretty bad."

The bait was taken. An hour later Martha filled a vacuum bottle with some chicken broth and put on her hat and coat.

"Might as well take the short cut over Talberry Creek," Hatworth said as she headed for the door. "That is," he added, "unless you're afraid of the dark."

Martha's derisive humph told him that this suggestion too had reached its mark. Hatworth waited until he heard his wife's steps

die off down the walk. Then he left the house quickly and headed across the adjoining fields for the house of his nearest neighbor, the Plummets.

As he paced down the path in the darkness, he visualized what would happen. Martha, crossing the Taberry Creek bridge, would step upon the loose planking and be catapulted into the center of the stream. Unable to swim, she would be carried out into the lower arm of Cannon Lake, where eventually her body would be drawn into the underwater current, to be finally deposited at Blackwell Marsh.

It was now six-thirty p.m. Martha should reach the bridge in a quarter of an hour or six forty-five. Immediately upon her falling, water would enter the old-fashioned case of the Lorenzo watch she always wore about her neck and stop it.

There was no reason for any suspicion, but in the event any were directed toward him, he would have a perfect alibi. For the stopped watch would indicate definitely not only the hour and minute of the accident but also the day of the week. And at that particular time he would be innocently chatting with the Plummets.

Everything happened as Hatworth had expected. He was part of the crowd of morbid onlookers that watched the investigation at the bridge, and he held his breath as Marshal Edmonds examined the splintered ends of the planks. But Edmonds only sighed and said:

"She fell through here all right and must've been carried out into the lake. I'm sorry, Martin, but I guess that's the way it was."

That was Tuesday, and it was not until Wednesday night that Hatworth began to notice the ticking. The sound came into his consciousness gradually, and he did not become fully aware of it until he was ready to go to bed: a low indistinct pulsation that

he fancied at first was the beating of his own heart. He sat very still on the edge of the bed and listened. But he heard nothing then, and after a moment got up and extinguished the light.

He fell asleep almost at once, but awoke an hour later, vaguely aware that he was straining his ears again. Was it his imagination or had he heard the tinkling chimes of a repeater watch, almost at the limit of his hearing range? The sound was not repeated, however, and he dozed off.

On the morrow he set about to search for his wife's inheritance which must be somewhere in the house since he knew Martha would have no time for banks. At the end of two hours, however, he stood again in the bedroom nonplussed. Though he had searched the house from top to bottom, he had found no trace of either money or bonds. For the first time his knack of finding lost articles had resulted in failure. He cursed savagely. And then suddenly a thought occurred to him.

Several nights ago when Martha had taken the Lorenzo watch from the chain about her neck to wind it, she had opened the back of the cover and scratched some words on the soft gold with her nail file. He knew that Martha had a bad memory. She was forever writing memos on odd scraps of paper. He couldn't be sure, of course, but it was reasonable to suppose that she had marked the location of her hiding place on the watch case.

He returned to the living room, took up a magazine and began to read. But presently he became aware of the ticking again. He sat there, listening. The sound had a hollow quality as if the watch—for unmistakably it was a watch—lay in a box or some covered receptacle.

Hatworth's fingers trembled slightly as he poured himself a glass of peach brandy before going to bed.

That night he dreamed. He was climbing up the sheer wall

of a granite cliff, fighting to find toe-holes in the black rock. Above him, a huge watch depended from a golden chain. But the rope to which he clung with his left hand was fastened with a careless loop over the hour hand of that watch. He could see the hand plainly; it rested horizontally on the quarter after the hour mark, and even as he watched, it began to move downward slowly. As the hand moved, the looped rope slipped relentlessly toward its end. He looked down in desperation. Below was a heaving sea, capped with fingers of flying spume. The yellow waves rolled and receded, and then he saw that they were not waves at all, but a layer on layer of microscopic watches, closely packed. Their faces seemed to be looking up at him like a thousand sightless eyes. And the huge watch above began to chime the half hour as the anchoring rope began to slip free.

Hatworth awoke, bathed in perspiration, trembling violently. Fantastic as it was, the dream had seemed real, so real that he could almost hear those chimes now, vibrating through the silence of the room. He did hear it! Lying there stiff and motionless, he strained his ears for a repetition of the sound. When it came—ten faint peals followed by a pause and two more chimes, Hatworth leaped from the bed, ran across the room and switched on the light. He saw nothing foreign or unusual.

Morning came, and he was definitely in bad sorts. He blamed the night's experiences on the peach brandy, and he cursed what in broad daylight seemed to be an overactive imagination. Noting that his supply of food staples was running low, he headed for town, deliberately taking the short cut road which led to the bridge over Talberry Creek.

The road was deserted as it had been since the new highway had been cut through a quarter mile farther west. Hatworth strode out onto the bridge and stopped to gaze over the rail down

at the dirty brown water. Suddenly he stiffened. Someone was coming. Well, he must remain the sorrowed husband, immersed in his thoughts. He didn't move.

The steps thudded hollowly as they entered the approach to the bridge. And there was something strangely familiar about those steps. Abruptly there came a crash, a rending of wood and a short cry. Hatworth wheeled.

But as he looked back on the sunlit bridge, he stared with incredulity. There was no one in sight. The bridge planking was firm and solid where it had been nailed down by the Marshal the morning before. And below the brown water of Talberry Creek swept on placidly without a ripple to disturb its surface.

When Hatworth returned with his provisions, he glanced at his watch as was his custom to see how long the trip had taken him. The watch had stopped at 6:45, though he was quite sure he had wound it the previous evening. He went into the living room and looked at the old-fashioned grandfather clock in the corner. Its pendulum hung motionless, and the hands were stopped at 6:45. A mounting sense of uneasiness began to sweep over Hatworth. He stood there a moment, gnawing his upper lip. Then he strode into the bedroom. The taboret clock he had given Martha for a Christmas gift three years before, would tell him the correct time. It never stopped.

But the sweep second hand of the electric taboret clock was motionless, and with a kind of grim horror Hatworth saw that the figures in the tape dial were 6:45.

Control left him then. With unsteady steps he moved into the hallway to the wall telephone and called Seth Denning, the town jeweler.

"Can you come over here right away?" he said when the connection was made. "I've got something I want to show you."

The time until Denning arrived Hatworth spent sitting in a

chair, staring blankly into space. At length, however, the jeweler arrived, a little precise individual with pince-nez glasses. He came in somewhat testily, irritated at having been called away from his shop. Silently Hatworth ushered him from one timepiece to another, then said huskily: "They all stopped at 6:45. I want to know what's wrong."

Denning stared. "You're a fool, Martin," he said. "I suppose though, I'll have to look them over just to satisfy you."

He busied himself for the better part of half an hour, taking off the back covers to reveal the movements, tapping a few things here and there, making adjustments.

"They're okay now," he said finally. "I'd have that grandfather clock cleaned one of these days, though, if I were you. It needs it pretty badly."

Hatworth nodded, then asked a question that was uppermost in his mind.

"Denning," he said, "how long can a watch run with one winding?"

The jeweler thought a moment. "Oh, fifteen or twenty hours in some cases. Depends on the watch."

"And do you think," Hatworth persisted, "It would be possible for a watch to stop and start again of its own accord? A watch that had been mislaid, for example?"

Denning shrugged. "It's possible, I suppose. Vibration might stop it; a jar could start it up again. Good-bye, Martin. Don't forget about cleaning that grandfather."

Late that afternoon Hatworth, still deep in thought, strolled down to the lake front. There he met Jeb Howatt just as the latter was climbing into a dory, preparatory to rowing out on the lake.

"I'm going to look oncc more," Howatt said. "If I don't find her I'm afraid it'll be up to you."

But Hatworth could stand it no longer. "Get out of that boat," he said huskily. "I've got to find her! Do you understand, I've got to..."

Howatt slowly climbed onto the wharf, and Hatworth took his place at the oars.

Three hours later he was back in his house, pacing back and forth restlessly. Though he had searched the length of Blackwell Marsh, he had found nothing. His entire plan hinged on the recovery of his wife's body. Without it, while there would of course be *corpus delicti* and consequently no evidence against him, there would likewise be no alibi and hence ample grounds for talk and rumor that even now he was aware was gathering. And there would be no Lorenzo watch. Hatworth was even more convinced now that the watch held the secret of his wife's inheritance.

It happened at that moment he was turning down the covers of the bed. Out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw a movement of something on the top of the dressing table. He turned very slowly.

Outlined darkly against the mahogany veneer of the table was the wet imprint of a female hand. Hatworth watched the little film of moisture slowly grow dim and grow smaller, to be replaced by a second impression farther along the table surface. It was as if an invisible blind person were there, groping for something it couldn't find. Then Hatworth saw a third point taking form near the center. At that point stood Martha's satin jewel box, and the top of its padded cover was depressed as if some round object rested there. Abruptly the depression was gone with the padded satin rising slowly back into position. Hatworth felt a cold draught of air pass through the room and out the door.

But nothing happened after that; he heard no further ticking and he slept the night through with the completeness of one whose nerves are bordering on exhaustion.

Next day Hatworth began a second and more systematic search of the house for his wife's inheritance. He left no article of furniture, no conceivable hiding place untouched. He probed the seat cushions of the chairs with a long needle. He took out the dowel pins and separated the sections of the tables. He looked for false bottoms in bureau drawers. He emptied vases, looked in back of pictures, even examined the chest where Matha had kept her silverware. He found nothing.

At nine o'clock that evening he headed for the lake front, carrying three loaves of bread, in each of which he had scooped out a hollow and placed a drop of quicksilver. A week ago Hatworth would have looked upon such stage props with an inward smile. Now he wasn't so sure. Old Wives Tales did say such loaves would float over a drowned body, and considering all that had happened he was not inclined to ridicule them.

He reached his dory without meeting anyone, untied the painter and pushed out onto the black lake. The oar locks were recently oiled, and there was no sound save the dip of his oars and the waves slapping against the prow. Hatworth rowed swiftly, watching the lights of Farn's Landing recede as the distance increased. Once a loon startled him as it dipped low in the sky and gave forth its queer laugh. He passed Crane Island, a darker shadow in the gloom, and headed directly for Blackwell Marsh.

When the reeds and cattails began to brush against the sides of the boat, he switched on his electric torch and played it over the water. Back and forth he moved, gradually working his way deeper into the marsh. But he saw nothing. No familiar white face leered up at him; no dark figure was revealed by the light of his flash.

He was somewhere in the southeastern tip of the swamp when he suddenly heard the ticking. The sound was remote at first, as though a watch hung somewhere above him, high in the air.

Then as he listened, it seemed to come from below, from beneath the surface of the water.

And then he saw it and a wave of horror swept through him. A foot beneath the dark waves, gleaming with a ghostly radiance, was the Lorenzo watch. He could see it clearly; the face cover was opened, and the hands pointed to six forty-five. But there was something else, an impossible something that held Hatworth's gaze like a lodestone.

A female hand held that watch; the moving fingers were caressing the case; they touched the stem and began to turn it slowly and deliberately. Even through the water Hatworth could see the movement of the fingers. He gave a scream of terror and pulled with all his strength on the oars.

The boat glided forward a few yards and drifted to a standstill. Again the ticking pulsed through the silence of the marsh; again he saw the watch and the hand in the circle of radiance a yard beyond the gunwhale. In desperation, Hatworth jerked the oar from its lock and brought it smashing down upon the water.

The flat blade made a pistol-like report as it struck the surface. Watch and hand vanished in the circle of foam and ripples, only to reappear when the water had quieted, nearer the boat. And then Hatworth gave in to stark fear. Once more he lifted the oar, but as he raised it, he shifted his position on the bottom of the boat, lost his balance and pitched headlong into the lake. He thrashed water violently, but in spite of his efforts, he felt a hand coil about his throat and drag him slowly downward . . .

Mark Brash, the undertaker, was pleased when he was told that the dual funeral was the most beautiful the town had seen in a long time. However, there were several matters that perplexed him not a little and dampened his satisfaction.

Brash was one of the group of townsfolk that finally discovered

the bodies of Martin Hatworth and his wife, Martha. They lay in a scant four feet of water near the edge of Blackwell Marsh. The body of Hatworth's wife was in a decent enough condition, considering the fact that it had been in the water for several days, and Brash realized he might have been mistaken when he got his first look at the woman's right hand. After all, there was only the uncertain light of a kerosene lantern, and he was not exactly accustomed to his new bi-focals. But he could have sworn that when that hand came out of the water, it was pulsing with life and the fingers were opening and closing convulsively. Yet subsequent observation on the embalming table plainly refuted this.

There was also the odd occurrence of the Lorenzo watch which hung from a chain about Martha Hatworth's neck. That watch showed five minutes past twelve when it was retrieved by Brash at Blackwell Marsh. The next day, however, when he went to place it with the other Hatworth possessions, he noted that the hands had moved. They had, in fact, advanced more than six hours, an impossible action considering the long immersion of the time-piece in water. Yet there it was; the hands pointed to six forty-five.

The La Prellò Paper

If anyone desired to set James Halliwell off in a temper he had only to quote the platitude, "Live with your times." It was not that he stood against progress, but from a standpoint of personal happiness and contentment, he looked upon the development of the last decade as insidious steps toward social decadence.

Halliwell liked good writing, good music and good art, but the modern schools of creative thought grated upon his senses. In keeping with his beliefs, he lived what he considered the life of a respectable gentleman of the past. His bachelor apartment was in a down-at-the-heels district, still genteel, but one which had been passed by the forward march of the city. His car was a 1930 vintage, and his dress—white embroidered vest, starched collar, heavy watch chain with ivory charm—would have made a stylist turn away with a smile.

All went well with Halliwell in his musty routine until he received a telephone call one May evening. A man who mumbled his name and described himself as an attorney-at-law, informed Halliwell that he had inherited some land.

"But I have no relatives," the bachelor replied, bewildered. "Who would will me anything?"

"The land is part of an estate of Mr. Guy Bedering and may not amount to much, financially speaking. It consists of four

lake shore lots at Lake Constance over in Deeple County. Do you know the place?"

"Yes, I believe so." Halliwell was thinking of Bedering and their many quarrels which had lasted for almost as long as he could remember. Bedering—potty old fool! Old enough to be Halliwell's father, he had considered himself a modern. Bought chrome chairs, went hatless out of doors, smoked those obnoxious cigarettes. He had moved away a year ago, and Halliwell hadn't heard from him since, but he must have relented in his argumentative stand at the end, for in life it was only their opposite views that had held them together.

The attorney continued, "If you will call at my office tomorrow, I'll give you the deed and the abstract and you can consider yourself the new owner."

Thus it was that noon of the next day saw Halliwell driving his old car at a humming twenty miles an hour out Highway 56, heading toward Deeple County and Lake Constance. He reached the lake at two in the afternoon, turned off into one of the many side lanes and began a search for his lots.

In due time he found them: a span of timbered land, two hundred feet in width by a hundred fifty in depth, fronting a rutted road on one side and a rather marshy beach on the other. The timber, Halliwell observed, was worthless, consisting mainly of jack pine and second-growth poplar. Nor was the site particularly suitable for building purposes, it being low with poor drainage. But what puzzled Halliwell was the large old signboard that stood just off the road, upraised from the tall weeds on high stilts.

The sign had been painted and repainted and now was weathered almost past recognition. Still visible was the legend on one side: CRASH, THE CIGARETTE OF THE AGE. And on the other: USE MCGOWEN'S ALL-PURPOSE FURNITURE POL-

ISH. But why any advertiser should have considered proclaiming his wares on this God-forsaken lane was to Halliwell a mystery.

He stood before the sign for several moments, studying it. The artist had utilized a familiar trick in the illustration that accompanied the "polish" legend. It showed an open door, with a table just beyond the threshold and on that table a huge bottle of polish. The picture on the bottle label was the same: open door, table beyond, and bottle on table. The effect on the observer was a wonderment how many doors there were in all. No matter how far he looked there was always another bottle, and another door. Halliwell noted with interest that the artist had done his work with curiously exacting care. He had carried out the illusion to almost microscopic detail, and for a moment Halliwell thought he could sense it going on and on into infinity.

There was a ragged hole in the sign, where the wooden paneling had rotted. Looking through this opening, Halliwell saw the beginning of a small path leading down through the woods. The path looked cool and inviting, and after a moment's hesitation he stepped through the hole and began to follow it.

He was conscious instantly of the sudden quiet that surrounded him. The birds which had been chattering before abruptly ceased all sound, and even the hum of insects was absent. Only the waves could be heard, swashing up on the distant lake shore. He followed the path for twenty yards when it made an abrupt turn to the left, climbing toward higher ground. The trees were thinner here, and the soil became rocky and covered with granite outcroppings. But the path itself was smooth enough; its surface was hard-packed gravel, and its borders were even and symmetric as if it had been made only a day or two before.

For some reason Halliwell felt nervous and ill at ease. The impression stole upon him that he had entered a tunnel of time

within which all life hung in a state of suspended animation. He smiled at that and continued walking briskly. Now the lake shore disappeared, and he found himself going along a kind of narrow gallery, the view on either side cut off by high walls of granite. In this fashion he walked for the better part of an hour, all sense of direction quite lost, for the path turned and twisted repeatedly.

He was about to turn back in disgust when the way before him suddenly dropped; he rounded a corner and there before him was the signboard and his parked car. Halliwell looked back of him puzzled. It seemed impossible that he could have made a complete circle, but apparently he had, and with a sigh he climbed into his car, glanced at his watch and started the motor.

He looked at the watch a second time. The timepiece must have stopped, for it still showed two-thirty, the hour of his arrival at the lots. Halliwell drove back down the lane, entered Highway 56 and began the trip toward the city at an even twenty-five miles an hour. He had gone a quarter of the way back when he relaxed his grip on the wheel for a moment to reach for his pipe. But the pipe was gone.

"Damnation!" Halliwell muttered. "I must have dropped it back there on the path."

Pipes were a fetish with him. He had one for each day of the week, and this was Saturday's briar, a full-bent favorite of his with a nickel-plated ferrule and a bowl that held a generous amount of tobacco. He hated to lose it.

Halliwell stopped the car, looked carefully in both directions, and satisfied that the highway was empty, made a complete turn and headed back in the direction from which he had come. Ten minutes later saw him entering the outskirts of a small town. He frowned perplexedly. He remembered no town here: in fact,

he was sure he had passed none since he had left Lake Constance. But there it was, printed in faded letters on a sign over the railroad depot: EMIT.

Driving down the main street, he was impressed by the scrupulous neatness of the buildings and the residences. It was more than a neatness. It was a geometric simplicity of line and angles as if the town were still on the architect's drawing board. Halliwell glanced at the cars on either side of the street and nodded approvingly.

None of these foolish streamlined affairs here. They were all fifteen or more years old. A sign in a corner drug store somewhat disconcerted him though. It read:

Landon for President

"Ought to take that down," Halliwell muttered to himself. "No sense in being as shiftless as that."

He crossed a bridge over a wide river, and he didn't remember that either. The only answer must be that in turning about, he had somehow got into the wrong lane and veered off into a second highway that ran parallel to 56. Satisfied with his line of reasoning, he increased his speed a little and presently ahead of him saw the blue circular expanse of Lake Constance.

Once again he drove down the rutted lane and parked before the broken signboard with the strange door illustration. He passed through the opening in the sign and began to retrace his steps along the path, eyes studying the ground carefully for his pipe. But he didn't find it. Aware now that the sun was beginning to drop in the west, he hurried back to his car.

But when he entered Highway 56 once more, something curious happened. Without thinking, he found himself reaching into his pocket for his pipe. He checked himself halfway and then

uttered a little cry of surprise. The pipe was there in his pocket, deep down in the corner.

"I must be getting old," Halliwell said to himself. "I could have sworn it wasn't there before."

For the first time now he was conscious that something was wrong with the road before him, but the truth didn't strike him until he had gone almost a mile. Then abruptly he realized that he was no longer on black top but on hard-packed gravel. The familiar U. S. and State highway markings were absent too. In their place Halliwell saw from time to time rustic placards with the words: *Gablewood Pike*.

Yet the surrounding landscape remained the same or very nearly the same. He crossed the bridge, and if it appeared somewhat newer and the river below narrower than it had before, he attributed these changes to the different slant of the sun which was low down in the west now.

He came at length to the town of Emit, and entering its main street, found himself looking absently for the Landon sign. He was glad to see that the sign was no longer there, but it occurred to him that he might have passed without seeing it. Somehow, the town looked older and yet in another way newer than it had before. The economy of architecture and plotting struck him as it had the first time, but with it came the impression that there was something perceptibly old-fashioned about the place. Quite suddenly it dawned upon Halliwell that no cars were parked at the curb; the vehicles were all horse drawn.

"Some sort of old-time festival," he remarked. But even as the words came to his lips, a vague inner fear began to rise up far back in a corner of his mind.

The town finally behind him, Halliwell fell to thinking over the day's event. Now that he had the four lots he wondered what

he would do with them. Sell them, he supposed, though in their present condition a potential market would be doubtful. It was queer about Bedering, willing him that property in the light of what had happened.

In a way they had been mutual friends and mutual enemies for more than ten years, ready to argue at the drop of a hat, each holding to his own ideas and beliefs. Halliwell had hated with a deep inner hate Bedering's complacent acceptance of new fads and styles, just as, he was aware, Bedering was irritated by his clinging to the past. Moreover, Bedering had seemed to take a delight in parading his newest acquisitions. Halliwell remembered well the day Bedering entered his apartment, walked straight across to the opposite wall and tore down the Currier & Ives "winter scene" that hung there in its heavy gold frame. He flung the picture to a corner where the glass broke in a hundred fragments and then mounted in its place some horrible work of cubistic art, replete with circles, squares and triangles.

"There," he said, standing back to admire the change. "I was getting sick and tired of seeing that crummy old chromo there. Improvement, eh?"

"Improvement! Get out of here, you jazz maniac!"

But even as for no sane reason they had clung to each other's company, Halliwell had laid plans to gain retribution for the indignities he had suffered at the other's hands. He had thought of a number of things: applying acid to Bedering's chrome chairs, destroying his entire collection of worthless modern books, breaking some of his *classics in swing* records, but none of them seemed satisfactory. Then one day he hit upon it.

In his spare time Bedering was writing a monograph on what he called the "Space-time coordinate." Some nonsensical drivel about the fourth dimension and another world impinged on our own. Bedering actually believed this. He said:

"We know that there are other planes of time, possibly two or three futures. I believe my paper, when it is published, will arouse some comment."

Still smarting from the action taken against his Currier & Ives, Halliwell had slipped the manuscript in his own briefcase one night when Bedering was not looking, deposited it in the trunk of his car and left with a smug feeling of satisfaction. That manuscript was still in his car, though Bedering had asked him frantically several times if he had seen it.

He had attempted to read the manuscript on one or two occasions when waiting for some appointment. But though he had studied the pages with care he could make no sense to any of it. Bedering had never quite got over the loss, and sometimes Halliwell caught him looking at him with eyes filled with suspicion.

Halliwell abruptly took his foot off the gas and applied the brakes. A wooden barrier extending the entire width of the highway loomed before him. As he came closer Halliwell read the sign painted in bright red letters:

ROAD CLOSED. DETOUR

Drat these construction companies. Why did they always select the summer months for road repairing? He hesitated a moment, noting that there was a choice of two detours, one leading east, one west. He chose the western, reasoning that it must lead in a direction closer to the city.

The road was a bad one, and soon he found it necessary to reduce his speed to a crawl, with the old car banging and rattling in a most alarming fashion. In this manner he traversed a mile of detour when suddenly he drew up with an exclamation.

Was he quite mad or was the scene before him the same scene he had left behind him, miles to the rear? But no, there was the lake, the timbered plot of land, and the signboard. The

same crazy signboard with the broken section and the illustration within an illustration of the open doors. But there was a difference, he saw with sudden relief, a very great difference.

The sign here was larger. It covered the entire right-of-way of the detour, and the road itself, not a path, continued through the ragged hole in the wooden paneling. Halliwell sucked his pipe thoughtfully. It didn't make sense, this building a signboard directly across a roadway. Then a thought struck him. The detour was doubtless a new one and a makeshift. It had been laid in the shortest route possible.

He started the car again and drove through the opening in the sign. Once on the other side, he saw no difference or change in the surrounding landscape, and that rather surprised him, for he had expected a change. If anything, the detour seemed in somewhat better condition here, and Halliwell began to think of what he would do when he reached home.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later that the unforeseen happened. The car missed firing, coughed, sputtered and died. Scowling, Halliwell ground on the starter for several long moments before he thought to look at the gas gauge. Then he swore fervently. The needle of the dial rested on the "empty" mark. Stalled miles from no place and night coming on. This *was* a predicament.

"Well, I'll just have to stop a passing car and beg a lift into town," he told himself.

He waited in vain. The detour remained silent and deserted, and in the fast-thickening gloom no approaching lights showed in either direction. But old-fashioned though he might be, Halliwell was also a realistic individual. He went around to the car trunk, opened it and took out a pillow and a vacuum bottle of cold tea which he always carried. He also took out Bedering's sheaf of manuscript which still lay in a far corner of the trunk where

he left it almost a year before. Might as well do a little reading to pass the time, he thought. If worse came to worse, he could sleep in the car and walk to town in the morning. He settled himself, turned on the dome light and began to read.

As before a noticeable spell of depression settled down upon him the moment his eyes fell on the first page. For a while he was impressed by Bedering's apparent erudition. Then he reached the following passage and reread it several times.

In 1874, La Prelló, the Spanish mystic, formulated a theory which in my opinion crudely antedated Einstein. La Prelló reasoned that time must be a variable dimension, extending into infinity from a common center like the spokes of a wheel. He who leaves point A, the hub, and advances along the time channel will as a matter of course arrive at point B. Yet if something were to disturb the existing coordinates—let us say a psychic impulse—who is to say he would not arrive at point C or even D?

La Prelló further postulated that if visual stimuli were placed before a receptive subject and that if that subject were contacted by certain mental impressions (outlined in what he called his "tempus diagram") the psychic residue might exert sufficient power to force the subject into a subsidiary time channel, regardless of his personal will.

"Balderdash," muttered Halliwell, "pure drivel." He tossed the manuscript into the rear seat of the car, leaned his head against the pillow and went to sleep.

When he awoke the sun was high, but the road was still void of any sign of travel. Halliwell rolled up the windows, locked the door and set off at a brisk walk. Finally, the road turned, and there before him was a town. Halliwell gazed at the familiar street and buildings and with an inner bewilderment that knew no answer, saw at once that it was Emit again. Like a man in a trance he headed into it, eyes casting about for a filling station.

He saw none. Neither did he see any cars. The few citizens he

passed were dressed in antique fashion, and the street was lined with watering troughs and hitching posts. Well, if there were no gas stations, perhaps he could get a can of fuel at one of the general stores. He entered one and asked for the proprietor.

When the man approached, Halliwell restrained a cry of astonishment. At first glance he was his old enemy, Bedering, in every detail. The same high forehead, the same bulbous nose, the same mocking twinkle in his eyes. Even as he saw that there were slight differences, Halliwell found himself voicing a question:

"Is . . . is your name, Bedering?" he demanded.

"Yes, it is. What can I do for you?"

"Not Guy W. Bedering by any chance?" Halliwell held his breath while he waited the answer.

"That's my son. He's in school."

"In school!" cried Halliwell.

"Yes, of course. Where else would a twelve-year-old be at this time of day. What was it you wanted, sir?"

Halliwell mumbled some vague reply and stumbled out the store into the street. In heaven's name, what was happening to him? Had he gone quite mad or was he still back in the car, dreaming a fantastic dream?

He entered a second store farther on and asked the clerk if he had any gas.

"Gas?" repeated the clerk slowly.

"Gasoline," snapped Halliwell.

"I've heard of it," the clerk said, "But we don't have any."

"Heard of it!" stormed Halliwell. "What is this, the state asylum or something?" He turned and strode out.

He paced rapidly out of town and onto the smooth expanse of Highway 56. He breathed easier when the buildings were behind him, but the air over the roadway was curiously hot and quiet. Not a leaf stirred; not a breath of wind was apparent. On

and on, he walked, his car forgotten, with a long-gaited stride that ate up the miles. A profound silence hung over him. He could hear the grating of his steps in the gravel and the creak of the leather in his shoes, but that was all.

At the end of an hour Halliwell became aware that the road was growing narrower. The low stunted trees pressed close on either side, and weeds and brush began to appear in the center of the hard-packed surface. The emerald green of May foliage had lightened perceptibly, too, and he seemed to be moving in a pastel world with no definite boundaries or outlines. And then he saw it. A cry of consternation rose to his lips.

No, he was not mistaken. Before him, extending from right to left side of the road was that sign, the same mad sign with the door opening upon a door and the torn ragged hole at the bottom through which the road ran. As Halliwell advanced upon it, the sign seemed to grow in size until it was as tall as a three-story building. He was fighting two emotions now, a wild desire to turn about and run and an irresistible compulsion to pass through the opening.

A moment he wavered; then he stepped through and continued on the other side. He moved automatically, his brain and body filled with a strange numbness. The hills and trees which had been all about him were gone now. In their place his eyes seemed to trace invisible rectangles and ellipses piled like some monstrous tesseract on the surface of a barren plane. Yet the way before him was vague and indistinct like a scene viewed through water. All save that steadily growing dot at the limit of his vision. He began to study that dot as he walked on, and the fear within him multiplied at each step.

For he knew that it was another sign and that beyond it would be another and another and another and that he must keep on going into infinity.

The Spanish Camera

No one would suspect Miss Lydia Lancaster of being a dreamer. She was conservative to primness, unemotional, and conventional. Yet for all that, it was a habit of hers to daydream constantly during those off moments when she was quite sure of being unobserved.

Miss Lydia worked as private secretary in the firm of Childers, Dourley and Ganston, 21 Maiden Lane. Her residence was in Bloomsbury by Russell Square, near the British Museum. And her life, the full thirty-three years of it up to the present, had been quite devoid of interest.

At five on Tuesday, the 5th of October, a dreary, rain-swept day, Miss Lydia put away her typewriter, dusted her desk, as usual, and prepared to leave the office. At that moment a messenger arrived and delivered to her a letter from a well-known solicitor. The letter was brief and to the point:

Dear Madam: I have to inform you that you have been named heir to certain monies and properties as stipulated in the will of the late George Faversham who died suddenly on Thursday last. Will you kindly call at this office at your earliest convenience.

BENJAMIN HOWELL.

Miss Lydia had to read that note twice before it dawned on her who George Faversham was. He was her uncle, but her uncle

in name only. That is to say, she had never met or even corresponded with him. The last of her mother's four brothers, he long had been regarded as the black sheep of the family. She knew he had never married and that he had spent the greater part of his life wandering about the back ports of the world. Two years in Nepal, through the Khyber Pass, up the Mahakam River in Dutch Borneo into unexplored Apo Kayan, into the white Indian country of the Upper Orinoco, he had come and gone like a will-o'-the-wisp. But why he should have bequeathed her anything or indeed remember that she even existed was more than she could conjecture.

Early next morning Miss Lydia called at the office of Benjamin Howell in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Howell, a somewhat younger man than she had expected, waited until she had settled herself in the chair opposite his desk. Then he opened a filing folder before him.

"Miss Lancaster," he said, "your uncle left you a small house in East Darwich, and the sum of fifty thousand pounds in cash or negotiable securities."

The significance of those words sank in slowly. Even at the end of five minutes after she had drunk the glass of water the solicitor gave her, she felt slightly dazed.

"Fifty thousand pounds!" she repeated. "Why, it's incredible! I'm—I'm rich!"

Mr. Howell nodded quietly. "The sum should take care of your needs for some time," he said dryly. "Now about the house in East Darwich. I should strongly advise disposing of it."

"Why?" asked Miss Lydia. "Is it run down?"

"Oh, it's in good enough repair. In fact it's quite attractive. But..."

"But what...?"

"Well, your uncle was a strange person, Miss Lancaster. He

visited some rather off the-trail places. There may be some things about the house, or rather, in it, that . . ." His voice broke off significantly.

But Miss Lydia was adamant. Inasmuch as George Faversham had been good enough to leave her this money, the least she could do was accept the lesser part of his bequest. Besides, she was independent now, it would no longer be necessary for her to work or live in London, and a country house was the very thing she needed.

"Very well," sighed Mr. Howell, "I've done my part. Here are the keys: the brass one for the front door, the iron one for the back door and two small keys for some chests you'll find in the house. According to the will, my instructions were that these chests were not to be touched or opened by anyone but you."

It was characteristic of Miss Lydia that she completed arrangements for her new life by the following Friday. Saturday she took the train to East Darwich, arriving early in the afternoon. As Mr. Howell had explained, the house was small and furnished in typical bachelor style. It was situated very close to the ocean shore and was quite alone, yet it appeared to be neither damp nor particularly isolated. The view from the parlor window was breathtaking with the craggy cliffs on one side and the foam-swept beach on the other.

Miss Lydia had all but forgotten the chests mentioned by Mr. Howell until she came upon them in the bedroom. Then curiosity seized her and she hastened to fit the keys into the locks. The covers thrown back, she stared in disappointment. In Miss Lydia's eyes they contained nothing of interest whatever. Photographic equipment: three cameras of different styles and manufacture, an enlarging device, a developing tank and a quantity of the necessary papers, films and chemicals.

She remembered her mother mentioning that photography had been George Faversham's stock-in-trade. During his earlier years he was employed by a large newspaper service. But more recently he had preferred to free lance, taking and selling pictures of unusual events as he came upon them.

She closed the two chests, pushed them back in a corner and promptly forgot about them. In the days that followed, Miss Lydia attempted to live the life of a gentlewoman of ease. She employed several female servants as well as a gardener and she completely refurbished the house in a manner to her own taste. She called on the vicar. She took long walks through the countryside-- but after years of activity and routine this state of affairs soon began to pall on her, and she cast about for some other means of capturing her interest.

It was thus that she thought again of the two chests. Why not photography as a hobby? She had all the materials she needed, and the picturesque shore and the town of East Darwich should offer many opportunities for a camera fan.

From the chests she selected the thirty-five millimeter camera, loaded it with film and strolled out along the beach.

Miss Lydia's ideas about picture taking were decidedly elementary, but she was familiar enough with cameras to know that this one was rather unusual. It was of Spanish manufacture with an F 3.5 Garcia color-corrected lens and a shutter speed up to a thousandth of a second. Just below the lens a small rectangle of silver had been fastened, the center of which was hollow and the outer surface covered and protected by a shield of glass. In this aperture could be seen a tiny black stone roughly carved in the shape of a coiled serpent. In the sunlight this stone glittered from a hundred different facets. The view finder, too, was rather odd. At times when she peered through it, Miss Lyd-

ia could see her subject clearly and distinctly. Again, an inner fog seemed to cloud the glass and the scene appeared hazy and indistinct as though viewed through water.

She took eighteen pictures that first day: of the shore, the sea and the streets of East Darwich. Then she set about to do her developing and printing.

Surprisingly enough, all eighteen negatives turned out well. But it was not until she had enlarged and dried her prints and spread them out on a table that she was able to take stock of her day's work. Then she leaned back with a glow of satisfaction.

The Spanish camera was a marvel. Sixteen of the pictures were sharp and clear with no undue highlights or shadows. There was the seashore with its smooth trackless stretch of sand and dashing spray. There was the distant fishing vessel outlined against the driven cloud. And there were the quaint crooked streets of East Darwich snapped in the clean freshness of early morning. She turned to the two remaining pictures and examined them carefully. One was merely fogged from pointing the lens into the sun. But the other—A queer thrill passed through her as she stared down upon it.

It was a sea view, taken from the top of one of the lesser cliffs. Miss Lydia remembered that picture very well, for it had cost her a torn dress climbing up the spume-wet rocks. It should have showed only an empty expanse of Atlantic with several sea gulls perched on a black pinnacle in the foreground. But at that point in the picture where the sky met the water—roughly in a space the size of a postage stamp—there appeared to be the miniature figure of a man—a man sitting in a chair with what looked to be a plate-glass window behind him. The whole thing was small with vague edges, yet the man's features—aquiline nose, bristly moustache, deep inset eyes—were sharp and clear. It gave the impression that one had pointed the lens of the camera through a cur-

tain of gauze and caught a fleeting glimpse of a mirage in the sky.

"Double exposure," said Miss Lydia to herself; but even as the thought came, she realized that couldn't be the answer. For she had taken no inside shots and the surroundings about the man's figure were definitely those of an interior.

She examined the camera again. Next she got out a magnifying glass and studied the plate-glass window background behind the man. Minute printing was discernible across this window and under the glass she slowly made out the words:

CAFE CLENARO

Her excitement mounted. There was no Cafe Clenaro in East Darwich. Of that she was positive. There was, however, a restaurant by that name in Poland Street, Soho, in London.

Miss Lydia went thoughtfully to bed. A hundred questions surged through her mind. Why should a camera which she herself had loaded with fresh film take a double exposure picture of an interior scene in London, hundreds of miles away. There seemed no answer, and she passed into a restless sleep. Toward morning she began to dream—queer fantastic dreams. She saw herself perched on a high tower with an enormous camera strapped about her body, and every time she pressed the shutter release, a huge serpent emerged from the lens chamber to glide about her in an endless circle.

Morning and she woke nervous and exhausted. A single thought was uppermost in her mind. She must go to London, to the Cafe Clenaro. She must wait for the man by the window, take his picture and compare that picture with the one on the table. For in her state of excitement, it somehow never occurred to her that the man might not come to the cafe or that he might not exist at all.

It was only when she was settled back in her seat on the train

with the sunlit woods and fields gliding by that the utter absurdity of her action struck her. At King's Cross she took a cab out Euston, down Tottenham Court Road and along Oxford to Poland Street and the Cafe Clenaro where she chose a table near the window and ordered lunch. Her camera in its case still hung by a strap from her shoulder, and her hands trembled slightly from a nervous expectancy.

Time passed, customers came and went, and Miss Lydia saw no sign of her man of the photograph. At length weariness stole over her; she paid her check and rose. Then suddenly she stiffened.

He was there, sitting in the chair by the window: a large, heavy-set man with a coffee colored mustache and wearing singularly incongruous pince-nez spectacles. Sunlight streaming in the large window cast him in sharp relief. As in a dream Miss Lydia reached for her camera. She unbuckled the leather flap and raised the view finder to her eye. An instant of focus and she clicked the shutter. And then an astounding thing happened.

The man leaped upward with a hoarse cry and tore at his throat. His eyes bulged, his face purpled, the veins of his neck stood out lividly. A moment later it was all over. While Miss Lydia stood there transfixed, the man slumped to the floor, twitched a few times and lay still.

A crowd gathered like magic, and in the ensuing confusion Miss Lydia sidled quietly to the door and made her escape. Outside, she walked the streets for half an hour before her heart quieted and she regained some of her composure. But even then with the reality of the afternoon traffic about her, she felt weak and dazed, like a person who had just been rescued from an on-rushing train.

She hailed a cab and rode to the offices of Benjamin Howell. The solicitor ushered her into his office with some concern.

"In heaven's name, what's wrong?" he demanded. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I believe I have," sighed Miss Lydia. "At least, I've seen a murder without apparent cause."

"Murder!"

In halting sentences she told him all that had happened. When she had finished Mr. Howell sat there, scowling.

"I think you're seeing too much in coincidence," he said. "A heart attack or a hundred other things might have caused the man's death, if he did die; however, let's take a look at that camera."

He did look, long and carefully. Finally he returned it to its case and handed it back.

"Unusual, but I see nothing wrong with it," he said. "I can assure you it's not a weapon of any kind. Now, may I suggest again that you sell or dispose of that house and all that's in it."

"But you said—"

"Miss Lancaster," said Mr. Howell, "you never knew your uncle. I did. Believe me when I say he was an extraordinary man. As you know, he spent the greater part of his life, photographing rare and unusual scenes. He—ah, have you ever heard of the *Trinidad Queen*?"

She shook her head. "I don't believe so."

The solicitor leaned back, closing his eyes.

"The *Trinidad Queen* was a blackbirdcr, an eighteen century slave-trade vessel, plying between Africa's west coast and the West Indies. In 1784 she left Martinique, ran into a storm, was blown off her course and foundered near the island of French Key in the Grenadines. Now her approximate position was thought to have been known for a long time and also known was the fact that her strong box contained nearly two hundred thousand gold guineas. There have been innumerable attempts to rescue that

gold, but the position was in deep water, exposed to the winds, and all such attempts failed."

Howell paused to tilt back in his chair and make steeples of his hands.

"In his travels, your uncle, George Faversham, came on a map purporting to show that the *Trinidad Queen* had actually gone down some miles to the east off Rojo Bank and was lodged on a comparatively shallow reef. He organized a party, hired a small motor cruiser and headed for the Grenadines. That was a year ago."

Howell opened the desk humidor and took out a cigar. Half-way to lighting it, he changed his mind and returned it to the box.

"Primarily, of course, your uncle's motive in the whole affair was photography. He saw in the underwater action, the movements of the divers about the old sunken vessel an opportunity to capture on film some dramatic scenes. He took three men with him: Garcia Perena, a Portuguese from Havana, Dane Kellogg, a non-practicing British physician, and Justis Hardesty, a nondescript American whom he found on the San Juan waterfront. It was agreed that your uncle should have all returns on the photography work while the treasure, if any were found, should be divided four ways—"

"But what has all this to do with—?" Miss Lydia interrupted.

"With your camera? It may have nothing to do with it," replied Howell, "and then again it may have everything. First of all, you should know that the *Trinidad Queen* sailed under a stigma that has continued down through these many years. It was said that on the West African coast her skipper went upriver to a native village and took from a crude altar a small particle of what was known as the Damballah serpent stone. All the black evil

which surrounded its *obeah* worship there in the jungle was said to have followed the captain and his ship."

Howell uncrossed his legs and shifted in his chair. "That's about all," he said, "except that your uncle eventually realized a part of his fortune from that expedition. He found the *Trinidad Queen* all right and he brought to the surface quite a large quantity of the gold. He also seems to have brought up that much discussed piece of the Damballah stone—that is my guess anyway as nature of that thing under the glass covering on your camera. But something happened on that expedition, something strange that drifted back to civilization only in the form of vague rumors. It was said your uncle very nearly lost his life on one of the underwater dives."

Miss Lydia failed to see any connection between Mr. Howell's story and the subject in hand, but she was too polite to say so. The solicitor urged her again to dispose of her newly acquired house, and a few minutes later, still nervous and unsatisfied, she took her departure.

Morning found her back in East Darwich, anxiously scanning the morning paper. Any doubt she might have had that the man of the restaurant was not dead was dispelled when she read the following:

DANE KELLOGG DIES UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES IN SOHO CAFE.

Kellogg! That was the name Mr. Howell had given as one of the three men who had accompanied her uncle on his expedition!

For a week Miss Lydia lived a life of tension and anticipation. The papers continued with a few more desultory accounts of the strange death; then the story died out. More than once during

that week she half decided to return to London and tell all she knew to the police. But a moment's consideration changed her mind. After all, she had done nothing that would interest Scotland Yard.

As time passed, however, she found herself thinking less about the man and more about her future work in photography. While in London she had picked up a pamphlet announcing a new prize contest in camera craft, and with typical amateur enthusiasm she cast about for worthy subject material.

Her strange dreams during this period continued, and strangely enough it was one of these dreams that formed into an idea for a picture. She dreamed she was walking along the beach in the moonlight and all about her were middle-aged men pleading with her to take their pictures, but every time she focused her camera and clicked the shutter the surrounding moonlight gave way to blackest night. When the moonlight returned again, the subject was writhing on the ground, desperately fighting a huge serpent.

The more Miss Lydia thought about this dream, the more it seemed to her that a moonlight shot of the ocean shore might be an ideal entry for the photography contest.

She chose her setting with extreme care. A hundred yards down the shore from her house, half buried in the sand, was the rotting skeleton of an old whale boat. In the background the wall of black cliffs formed a natural archway with the sand piled high in curious shaped dunes about it.

Loading the camera with a high speed film, Miss Lydia took along a collapsible tripod and went out on the shore one night shortly after darkness had set in. The sky, lit by brilliant stars, was shot here and there with flying spindrifts of cloud, but the moon had not yet arisen. Waiting for it, she sat on an outcropping rock and felt a vague uneasiness steal over her. At length

the moon peered whitely over the tops of the trees and the rolling surf changed on the instant to silver.

Miss Lydia mounted the Spanish camera firmly on the tripod, focused it so the whale boat would be in upper mid-center of the picture and opened the lens to its full F. 3.5. She clicked open the shutter and waited, watching the minute hand of her wrist watch.

She took several pictures. Back in her house, she set about developing and printing. As she worked, a queer feeling that she was being watched by unseen eyes seized her. Nervously she caught herself looking over her shoulder several times.

Only two of the negatives proved suitable for printing. One of these was fairly successful, but the effect was rather that of a dull daylight shot. It was the second picture which drew her up short.

Double exposure again! The sandy strip of beach was very clear with the mellow moonlight caught perfectly. But the old whale boat was not there! In its place were the head and shoulders of a man—a Latin looking man this time, with dark features and a receding hair line. He was leaning against the front of a building, and Miss Lydia recognized that building as she studied it with her magnifying glass. It was the Drury Lane Theater.

Miss Lydia did not sleep well that night. She awoke at fitful intervals the last time at three-thirty a.m. by the radium-faced clock on her dresser. The house was quite still, save for the distant swish and boom of the surf. Yet this time she was positive some unusual sound had awakened her. She got up, put on a dressing gown and slippers and made her way to the front door.

The moon had gone down, and the night was steeped in shadows with only the glow of the stars. But as she stood there, the chill wind clutching at her gown, Miss Lydia suddenly stiffened. Ahead of her one of the shadows had detached itself from the others and

was slowly advancing toward her. It was the figure of a man who seemed to glide rather than walk across the lawn. The lower part of his body was wreathed in mist, but to the woman in the doorway it seemed his face was clear and distinct, it was the face of a middle-aged man with mental strength and determination. Under one arm he carried a camera and in the other hand a book.

Coming to a halt in the open space before the door of the house, he suddenly poised the camera at some unseen object. Then he passed on to the far end of the veranda, took the book from under his arm and proceeded to wedge it between the ornamental porch rails. After which he turned and glided toward that point where the lawn merged into the sand of the beach. And there the mist seemed to gather about him in loose flowing coils until he had disappeared.

Was she dreaming? Miss Lydia rubbed her eyes and stared before her in sleepy bewilderment. She went back into her bedroom and returned with a powerful flashlight. But although she probed the white beam from the birches on one side to the azalea bed on the other, she saw nothing.

Morning, and she was half way through her solitary breakfast before she suddenly remembered the book. That at least would prove whether her experience of the night was an actuality. Hurrying out onto the veranda, she stopped stunned. A book was there, still wedged between the porch rails, still damp from morning dew.

Miss Lydia stepped forward, took the book and glanced at its title. It was a well worn copy of *West Indian Journal*, by Pan-son McBeal, published in London in 1897, and after a quick glance Miss Lydia thought it queer that anyone would read such a book. It was out of date in style and subject matter, containing only one yellowed map. But a glance at the map told her that this

book was undoubtedly the source of her uncle George Faversham's information as to the actual location of the *Trinidad Queen*. The actual site of the ship on French Key was carefully marked, together with the depth soundings.

One thing about the map puzzled her. On the margin at the bottom, in tiny hurried script was written *twenty-seven*. Why should anyone in the apparent haste that this writer was take the time to write those words instead of the numerals 27? Miss Lydia turned to page 27, but there was nothing unusual about it. Then words spoken by Solicitor Howell came back to her: "Your uncle was a strange man, Miss Lancaster. He did things in unusual ways." Was there a clue to his life, to the mystery of his camera in those two words written at the bottom of the map page?

She began looking on pages that were divisible by 27, without result. Then she looked simply at those pages in which 27 was a component part. She got no place here either.

Abruptly she paused and began to count the letters in those two words. Counting the hyphen, they totaled twelve. She wrote down the numeral, 12, and looked at it abstractedly with the long habit of one who appreciates numbers for what they are. During the summer of '43, Miss Lydia had worked in the cryptograph department of British Intelligence, and now, without thinking, she applied her training here. She added the two digits of 12, making three; she added a 4 for the division of 12 by 3 and then swiftly multiplied the 34 by 12 and to this 108 she subtracted the total of 34 plus 12 or 46, leaving 62. All the while she was quite aware that her actions would seem meaningless to the casual observer.

Turning to the book again, she looked on page 62, sixth line down, second word in. The word she found there—"they"—didn't

mean much. But when she had followed it with words in the identical position on every subsequent page with a six or a two in it, she stared astounded at her written result.

As Solicitor Benjamin Howell had told her, three men had accompanied her uncle on his trip to the *Trinidad Queen*, the foundered slave-trade vessel: Danc Kellogg, Justis Hardesty and Garcia Perena. The message which she had extracted from the West Indies travel book was a black condemnation of those three men. Briefly it told of George Faversham's overhearing the three plot to murder him. Murder for his share of the salvaged gold!

Miss Lydia closed the book thoughtfully. Why had George Faversham taken such pains to hide his message in the pages of that book? Simply because he was queer and eccentric? That might be one reason. But undoubtedly it was because at the time of the writing he was afraid one of the three—Hardesty, Kellogg, or Garcia Perena—would discover that he knew the truth. But if such an attempt against his life were plotted, why had her uncle not made an attempt to prosecute the three after his return to civilization? Howell had told her the answer. The men, fearing retaliation, had disappeared.

For two days Miss Lydia sought to forget these facts and lose herself in the routine duties of her house. The moonlight photograph with its fantastic inset of the man standing before the Drury Theater entrance haunted her. On the third day she could stand it no longer. Salving her conscience with a list of things she needed in London, she caught the morning train. She took her camera along.

That night found her stumbling back into her house, dazed and haggard. Her eyes were bloodshot. She went directly to her bedroom and lay down in the darkness while a thousand mad thoughts swirled through her brain.

The camera had repeated itself. In London she had gone directly to Drury Lane Theater at Drury Lane and Catherine Street, and focused her gaze on that section of the theater entrance which had found itself in her photograph. Within half an hour it had happened.

A man with Latin features and impeccably dressed had paused in her ellipse of stage to light a cigarette. An instant Miss Lydia stared at him. Then her arm shot sideward of its own accord, opened the leather case of her camera and jerked the instrument to eye focus. "No!" she told herself. "I must not! I must not!" But a will other than her own ruled her every move. Through the view finder she saw the man standing there. She clicked the shutter.

In her room now, Miss Lydia tried to expel the scene from her thoughts. The man had died there, died horribly, but drawn by the same inner hypnosis she had lingered while the crowd gathered and a phlegmatic bobby made his identification. The man was Garcia Perena, a citizen of Havana!

Out of her confused mind, as she lay there in the darkness, a single thought rose to repeat itself over and over again. The camera with its accursed Damballah stone must be destroyed, must be sent back to the depths from which it came.

Miss Lydia got out of bed, took up the camera and went out of the house. She went down the gravel path past the bed of azaleas and onto the moonlit beach. The booming surf seemed to resound in tune with her steps and the night wind caught her hair and skirts and whipped them out behind. She was heading for the Needle, a small promontory that stabbed out into deep water. There she could throw her camera away forever without any fear that it would be washed up on the beach.

The moon was brilliant and she seemed able to see for miles

in the cold light. Half way to the Needle she suddenly halted. A man was approaching her from far down the beach. As yet he had not seen her, for she was moving in the shadow of the flanking cliff. For some reason stealth appeared to be in his movements, and Miss Lydia darted behind a boulder to let him pass. The man passed her and went on, walking with a slight limp in his right foot. She waited a moment, then began to follow.

He passed through her garden to the rear wall of her house and began to fumble with the fastenings of the window there. The window slid open, and the man gripped the sill preparatory to lifting himself through the opening. And as she stood there watching in the shadows, a feeling of something evil swept over Miss Lydia. Her camera was trembling like a thing alive in its case hanging from her shoulder. Abruptly it seemed to lift of its own accord into her hands. A cry of horror rose to her lips at the realization of what was happening.

With a jerk the man spun around, staring.

And calmly, and matter of factly, moved by another will, Miss Lydia lifted her camera to focus and clicked the shutter. A span of mist appeared to radiate outward from the lens. That mist seemed to open like a white envelope, from the depths of which the coils of a yellow green serpent emerged.

The serpent slid slowly forward, and the man at the window stared in fascinated horror. He threw himself sideways, attempted to leap over a collection of flower pots. He tripped and fell. And while his screams rent the night air, the serpent slid slowly over him and began to gather its coils about his throat.

Mr. Benjamin Howell visited Miss Lydia the day after the inquest. He found his client in surprisingly good spirits, a little nervous from the ordeal of answering police questions but seemingly relieved that the jury had found a verdict of "death at the hands of person or persons unknown."

"But who was he?" Mr. Howell asked. "Your letter said something about a thief trying to break into your—"

He was just that," replied Miss Lydia calmly. "But in addition his name was Justis Hardesty who you will remember was the third and last of the men who accompanied my uncle on the *Trinidad Queen*."

"But I don't understand," began Mr. Howell.

"The three of them—Hardesty, Kellogg and Garcia Perena—were fiends, cold-blooded fiends," continued Miss Lydia. "They deliberately plotted to murder my uncle, to sever his life-line and air hose while he was under water on the deck of the sunken vessel. Now all three of them are dead, and my uncle can rest in peace."

Howell half smiled. "Oh come, Miss Lancaster, you can't really believe George Faversham had anything to do with the death of those three men. It was pure coincidence that two of them died when they did. As for Hardesty, he simply read in the paper of your inheriting your uncle's fortune and saw in your house a good place to rob. As for that camera—by the way what did you do with the camera, Miss Lancaster?"

"It's gone," she said.

"Gone?"

Miss Lydia nodded cryptically and left the matter at that.

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